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THROUGH EGYPT IN WAR-TIME

BAROQUE ARCHITECTURE

By MARTIN S. BRIGGS, A.R.I.B.A.

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SUNSET ON THE SWEETWATER CANAL, ISMAILIA.

THROUGH EGYPT IN WAR-TIME

BY

MARTIN S. BRIGGS

AUTHOR OF

"IN THE HEEL OF ITALY," "BAROQUE ARCHITECTURE," ETC.

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ac.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.
ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON

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First published in 1918



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN the good old days before the war, Egypt was the happy hunting ground of millionaires. Now we of the E.E.F. have entered their preserve in our hundreds of thousands, obtaining admission by the simple expedient of donning a khaki uniform. We too have danced to Shepheard's band, and have sentimentalised over the Sphinx by moonlight.

The wealthy tourists stayed in Cairo, in Luxor, and in Assouan, doing their sight-seeing from the deck of a comfortable steamer on the Nile. Many of us have lived in Cairo or in Alexandria, most of us have seen something of those cities during our "local leave," and a fortunate few have visited Luxor and even Assouan. But the steamers ceased running long ago, and now the millionaires haunt the hotels no more.

The Egypt we know is very different from the tourist's Egypt. During 1916 most of us were encamped on the bare sands of Sinai, on the unknown Libyan coast, in remote oases far out in the western desert, or in little mosquito-ridden towns on the Nile. In 1917 we marched into Palestine, and spent the summer in the dusty barley-fields outside Gaza, or on the banks of the desolate Wadi Ghuzze.

Travel-books describing Egypt and Palestine exist in hundreds, but they dismiss in a few lines the places we know best. The object of this volume is to picture Egypt as the soldier has seen it, from Sollum on the borders of Tripoli to Gaza in Palestine, and from the Mediterranean to the First Cataract at Assouan. It has no military significance, for it only records the trivial doings of a non-combatant who has had the unusual experience of having lived in nearly all the camps occupied at various times by the E.E.F.

This book has been prepared under unfavourable conditions, during constant travelling, involving many interruptions. Many

of my personal diaries which were intended to supply the narrative and descriptive passages failed to arrive from home in time to be utilised; some of my sketches have been lost at sea on their way to England, and certain books of reference that would have added to the value of the work have not been available. With the exception of the photograph entitled "Yashmaks," for which I have to thank The New Egypt Photo Stores, Cairo, the whole of the illustrations and maps are the product of my own pen, paint-box, and camera. For the most part, the drawings were made long before any thought of publication entered my head, and thus they represent my own fancies at the time rather than any careful series of records. The Editors of the *Burlington Magazine* have kindly allowed me to reproduce one of my drawings and part of my article describing the Shellal Mosaic, recently published in their columns.

The difficulty of communication with England made it impossible for me to read the proofs, and I sent home my manuscript and illustrations in the pious hope that the greater part of them, at any rate, would escape the attacks of the tin-fish and the Censor.

For indispensable help in passing this book through the press I am indebted to my father the Rev. G. S. Briggs.

M. S. B.

EGYPT,
July, 1918.

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THROUGH EGYPT IN WAR-TIME

CHAPTER I

AT THE BASE

EARLY on the morning of February 16, 1916, when the hospital ship —— was eleven days out from Southampton, we saw from her deck a glittering line of golden sand. As we drew near we could distinguish the feathery heads of a few palm-trees, and then someone with much keener eyes than my own spied a camel.

Egypt at last!

To some of us, I suppose, Egypt implied no more than a house of bondage; to others it was almost an enchanted land, of which we had read much without any expectation of seeing its wonders. On the voyage some men had played bridge in the smoking-room almost continuously, others had been learning Arabic or studying guide-books, and I had found that my Baedeker was embarrassingly popular. But as we approached Alexandria even the bridge enthusiasts woke up, and condescended to lean over the taffrail.

Instead of being sent to the Ypres salient or some similar destination, we had been detailed for service in a place where no one could complain of any lack of sunshine, and where most of us, at any rate, were actually looking forward to enjoying new sights and scenes. The Dardanelles evacuation had been completed, and we had no idea whether we were to remain in Egypt for any length of time or to be packed off elsewhere.

The voyage had been in no way eventful. In those days a brilliantly illuminated hospital ship was not regarded as fair game for submarines, and, though we had had the usual boat-drill, no anxiety was felt as to "accidents." After we entered the Mediterranean, concerts were organised on deck, and the long

line of green lamps with the great red cross amidships served as a romantic setting for some really excellent music. We spent our days much as one would on a pleasure cruise, and, except for a day or two of rough weather in the Bay of Biscay, I have only pleasant recollections of the whole voyage.

Incidentally, I was making my first acquaintance with the R.A.M.C. in bulk, for the greater number of the troops on board consisted of a "general hospital" bound for some unknown Eastern destination. It is an unusual experience, though not unique nowadays, for an architect to wear the badge of the medical profession. Sometimes it has led to amusing situations, often it has been a source of embarrassment. I have become used to being addressed as "Doc" by strangers, and have had to make elaborate explanations.

Having failed to obtain a R.E. commission, through alleged physical disabilities, I heard by accident of such things as Sanitary Sections, for which architects were occasionally required as commanding officers, and a few months later I was interviewed and gazetted.

But after only eight weeks of forming fours, physical drill, riding-school, inoculations, and other military pursuits in London, I was hustled off to Egypt with a draft of thirteen men, ostensibly to fill some urgent vacancy. It is probably due to this unexpected turn of events that I have drifted about, more or less, ever since, and thereby have been enabled to see far more of the world than if I had brought a properly organised Sanitary Section abroad with me a few weeks later, and settled down "for the duration" in some benighted spot on the desert. With me was another officer in like case, one D., who eventually became, like myself, a wanderer on the face of the earth, and who also brought thirteen men with him as a draft.

The work of a Sanitary Section hardly forms appetising "copy" for a book of Egyptian impressions, but some reference to it is almost inevitable to explain the chapters that follow. The unit is a new one, and had hardly been tried before the present war. Sanitary Sections are, for the most part, recruited in London, and are trained at two barracks in Chelsea. The personnel consists of one officer and twenty-five N.C.O.'s and men. The officer is either a medical man or possessed of some technical

qualification which implies a knowledge of sanitation. In early days doctors were appointed to most of these commissions, but as their services became more and more valuable elsewhere, an increasing number of engineers, architects, analysts, bacteriologists, etc., took their place.

The N.C.O.'s and men are chiefly employed in inspecting camps, and, as this work requires intelligence, have been drawn largely from the scholastic profession, especially from the L.C.C. teaching staff, as well as from more obvious sources, such as the employees of public-health authorities. But under my own command during the past two years I have also had a musician, a comedian, a painter, a church decorator, an engine-driver, a hairdresser, several tramwaymen, a baker, a bookbinder, butchers, millhands, colliers, clerks, and shopwalkers! The N.C.O.'s are usually men who have been sanitary inspectors in civil life, less frequently architects, and it is desirable that a few practical men from the building trades should be included.

A Sanitary Section, though so small a unit, is completely self-contained, and is not attached to any larger R.A.M.C. formation. It may be attached to a division, or may be stationed permanently in some standing camp or near some garrison town. Having had experience of all three alternatives, I have no hesitation in saying that work for a moving division is infinitely more difficult and harassing than a comparatively placid existence at some definite spot. With a division, however, one does see something of the war and feel that one is part of the great war machine.

Work so unromantic as inspecting camps, disinfection, and water-testing, can only be tolerable to some of us if it involves a constant change of environment. Sanitary Sections have undoubtedly done good work, and even valuable work, in the war; they probably do their best work when stationed at a fixed post rather than when trekking with a division, but at the best it is humdrum routine, and any man with imagination must feel thankful if his destiny leads him to an appointment where he can see something besides sanitation, and, above all, something besides war.

D. and I, however, had very little idea of what our work would be as we gazed at the harbour of Alexandria that February morning. We were both agog to go ashore as soon as possible. He

was something of a traveller, having explored the uttermost Amazon; but my wanderings had previously been limited to Europe, and a new continent to conquer is something of an event.

The powers were obdurate, and not till next morning could we land.

Apparently the urgency of our mission was not realised by the Higher Command, and when we landed from a little harbour boat, after a choppy sail, we were free to wander at our own sweet will. The war was rather crudely brought to our notice by a pile of huge shells that were being loaded into a lorry on the quay, but we soon escaped from such unpleasant sights into what we then imagined to be the atmosphere of the mysterious East. Indeed, the *Wanderlust* had so possessed us that we took a vulgar tram in search of some foreign restaurant where we could eat a savoury omelette in Continental fashion, disdaining to follow the crowd in *gharris* to the Club for lunch.

The word *gharri* is only one of the exotic terms introduced into the army from India, but it is understand now by every street-urchin in Alexandria and Cairo, while *pukker* and *chit* form part of every modern subaltern's rich vocabulary. One hardly ever hears a soldier in Egypt ask for an *arabiyeh*, though that is the Arabic name for a cab, a railway-carriage, or almost anything on wheels. In the remote Siwa Oasis I was amused to hear the aborigines call a Ford car a "tramway."

Our quest for a meal in a picturesque setting was something of a failure, and we fed among *effendis* and Levantines, though a few hundred yards away—had we but known it—was an excellent French restaurant where a British officer might lunch. Alexandria, like Vienna, seems to be a city whose moderate-priced restaurants are not easily found by strangers.

The streets and shops in the centre of the town were crowded with khaki, and especially with officers and men of the R.A.M.C., varied with the grey-and-white costumes of nursing sisters and V.A.D.'s. For besides a part of the Army which had so recently landed from Gallipoli after the evacuation, there was the large permanent population of a base and of the principal hospital centre for our numerous ventures in the Near East. The Rue de Ramleh was lined with hawkers of postcards and small articles of hardware, leering Egyptians who announced their goods as

"very nice," "very cheap," or "very clean," and cried, "You buy, one pence." Subalterns whose sleeves were adorned with one or two "pips" were adjured to "Buy this stick, Mister Captain." Cinemas, and places of entertainment providing all the various attractions of the disreputable Orient, were doing a roaring trade. In the harbour, as we returned from our jaunt, there were ships of every kind—warships, transports, hospital ships, and ordinary mercantile craft. Town and harbour alike were cheerfully illuminated, and Alexandria was altogether a gayer place after dark than it has been since submarines became a serious menace.

We spent three nights on board after anchoring in harbour. The captain was becoming visibly anxious for our departure, and his R.A.M.C. passengers were painfully conscious that their valuable services were apparently not so very urgently required in Egypt after all. One morning the officers commanding the R.A.M.C. units on board set out to obtain some sort of instructions, and reported themselves without any appreciable effect. It appeared that none of us were either expected or wanted; so we were allowed to go ashore in small detachments, either to explore Alexandria or to absorb whisky-and-soda at the Club, as our fancy led us. On the fourth day D. and I received orders to proceed with our small drafts to the R.A.M.C. Details Camp at Mustapha Pacha, a few miles east of the city proper. The proceeding was accomplished partly on foot and partly by crowded tramcars. A little after dark we arrived at the barracks, and were promptly relieved of our men, who were apparently to be distributed over Egypt and adjacent countries in small doses, as required.

This painful separation over, we were directed to a bell-tent, which was to be our temporary home, and to an adjoining mess, where we were to feed.

Mustapha Camp, in those days, was a busy clearing-house for drafts of various kinds, and the mess was crowded with officers of many regiments, but especially with those of the R.A.M.C. A Greek contractor was employed, and black waiters in the customary white robes of their class, with red tarbush, sash, and slippers, appeared to us very picturesque. The gardens outside were heavy with the scent of magnolias, reminding me of the *Schlossgarten* at Karlsruhe that I had visited only a few weeks

before the war, and a scratch military band played beneath the mess window. Small palms grew in the white sand among our tents, and it amused me to hang my glass on one of their trunks when shaving next morning. The moonlight was wonderfully brilliant, so much so that one could easily read a letter without lighting a lamp. In the huts near the barrack buildings we heard a curious sound, to which we listened for some time. In North Country accents men were calling out numbers—"Fotty-one," "Number three," "Sixty-two," and so on. Not for some days did we discover that this was the famous game of "House" that has bridged so many awkward gaps in the Army's time-table, and somehow eludes the vigilance of the restrictions against gambling.

The nights appeared very cold to us who had never slept in a tent before, and the days seemed oppressively hot, though in reality much cooler on the coast than elsewhere in Egypt. I pitied the dusty columns of serge-clad troops returning from their morning route-marches.

But the officers were not allowed to escape. Of the fighting men's doings I know nothing. We "medicals" were paraded each morning for physical drill at 9.30 a.m. D. and I were still comparatively fit after two months of strenuous Swedish exercises in London, but some of the others appeared to be quite new to it. Spectacled and middle-aged specialists from Harley Street, men who presumably had done nothing more active than pocket fat fees for twenty years past, were held by the ankles by some colleagues and made to bend backwards over a form till their knees cracked and their heads touched the ground. We were manœuvred by a gorgeous Captain. He wore the R.A.M.C. badge, but his riding-breeches were a triumph, and he ought at least to have been a Major in the Guards. He addressed us as "Gentlemen" and treated us as schoolboys. Occasionally there was a second parade for squad drill.

Another compulsory method of killing time for R.A.M.C. officers was to visit some local hospital in a drove, to study all the latest things in diseases and wounds. I had discovered already by this time that to convince the numerous authorities concerned that I was not a doctor, though wearing a medical badge, would involve hours of elaborate explanation and the filling up of countless forms, so I decided to go with the crowd

and slip out as soon as an opportunity occurred. I was pressed to see various surgical horrors and to apply my ear to some manly chest, but contented myself with temperature-charts and the rôle of a listener for half an hour, then fled with D. to eat ices elsewhere. Eighteen months later D. was on the staff of this very hospital!

After three days of this wearing existence, as there seemed to be no very urgent call for our services, we two applied for leave to visit Cairo; for we were still quite ignorant of our ultimate destination, and, if that were to be Mesopotamia, we should have felt very foolish if we had not seen the most fascinating of Eastern cities. So to Cairo we went for "the inside of three days," and saw as much as two energetic and able-bodied tourists could do in so limited a time.

On returning to Mustapha we found that all our men had been despatched to their new posts, and three days later D. received orders to proceed to Ismailia. My own orders did not arrive for another week, thus allowing me to see a good deal of Alexandria and its surroundings.

The city lies on a narrow spit of land between Lake Mariut (the ancient *Mareotis*) and the sea. For many miles in either direction all the vacant spaces between villa suburbs or great docks were occupied by military camps. There were several such between Alexandria and Mustapha. Beyond the straggling residential quarter of Ramleh, east of Mustapha, lay the great camp of Sidi Bishr, still existing on a much smaller scale to-day. It was the first real desert camp that I had seen. The blinding glare of the sun on the white sand was pitiless for weak eyes. Of all the plagues of Egypt, that has always seemed to me one of the most trying, even with dark sun-goggles over my ordinary spectacles. Yet many men seem little worried by it, and the shaded glasses issued by Ordnance are very little used.

Sidi Bishr differed only in detail from the great camps along the Suez Canal, where most of us spent the summer of 1916, but it was bounded on the north by the Mediterranean and on the south by a grove of date-palms, while in the centre stood a windmill and a mosque on a sandy hill. So, as desert camps go, it was not to be despised, and a few months later it was converted into a rest camp for the troops on the Canal. But to a novice

it seemed the abomination of desolation. In those days we did not know what desolation meant!

The surroundings of Mustapha Camp were much less arid. It, too, had the sea on the north, but just across the main line on its south was a reed-fringed lagoon where were fishing-boats and wild-fowl. Often I used to wander round the farther side of this shallow lake among the irrigated gardens and strange vegetation, making my first acquaintance with the common objects of Egyptian agricultural life or with new birds and flowers.

Beyond lies Alexandria's chief pleasure-park, the Nouzha Garden, very much like the conventional park of any city in Southern Europe, and laid out on the ordinary lines of the English landscape school. The green carpet is doubly welcome after the glare of a sandy camp, but it requires an enormous amount of careful watering even in this comparatively mild coastal climate. Trees and flowers are, of course, exotic to our eyes, and a half-hearted Zoo adds to their attractions, for some people. Beyond the garden is the ancient Mahmudiyeh Canal, winding among palm-trees. In many places this canal is exceedingly attractive, with a succession of barges creeping slowly along, their great triangular sails spread to the north wind. But where it touches the city itself, its banks are dirty and squalid, sprinkled with verminous children and all the litter of Eastern slums. South of this canal one crosses a few bare fields to the banks of Lake Mariut, which stretches to the horizon, a great lagoon dotted with the white sails of fishing-boats.

The western end of the city had an almost entirely mercantile aspect before the war, with quays and warehouses extending for miles towards Mex, but here again the Army spread itself over every acre of unoccupied ground, and here it still remains on a smaller scale. Streams of A.S.C. lorries still rumble along the paved streets between docks and depôts. But these camps at Gabbari and Wardian are not so favourably placed as Mustapha or Sidi Bishr, for, apart from their more squalid surroundings, they are separated from the sea by docks, and so bathing is less easy. If I were asked to name the pleasantest feature of my two years in Egypt, I should unhesitatingly plump for the bathing. I have bathed in the Mediterranean or in Lake Timsah on nearly

half the days I have spent in Egypt, and even in the coldest weeks in the winter it is enjoyable. The conditions vary greatly on different beaches, for it is more than 600 miles from Sollum on the Italian frontier to Gaza in Palestine, and at most of the places east of Port Said there is a strong current, which in Palestine is often dangerous.

Stanley Bay, a few minutes' walk to the east of Mustapha Camp, is one of the most fashionable bathing-places near Alexandria during the season, but when I plunged into its blue waters in February, the gay throng was not in evidence. All European Cairo flits to hotels or villas in this neighbourhood during the hot months, and all the wealthy Greeks and *effendis* follow with their harems. The long line of suburbs between Mustapha and Sidi Bishr is known in general as Ramleh. The word *ramleh* in Arabic means "sand," but the sand is for the most part covered by roads and villa gardens.

The eastern half of Alexandria is not really Oriental at all. It differs only in matters of detail from the modern quarters of other seaports across the Mediterranean. The streets are labelled with French names, while on the pavement one seems to meet far more English and French and Italians and Greeks than Egyptians. The general effect is more English, perhaps, than in the European quarters of Cairo, but rather Italian or French than English, and the brilliant sun combined with the sea-breeze puts even our Cornish Riviera into the shade. In the Rue Cherif Pacha at Alexandria one might imagine oneself in the Via Roma at Genoa or in the Toledo at Naples. But even nowadays, when much of the military population of this great base has moved eastward with the Army, khaki still remains the prevailing tint in the shopping streets, and is likely to continue so "for the duration." Reinforcements will still arrive, our ships will still discharge their cargoes in spite of U-boats, and wounded and sick will still pour into the great hospitals.

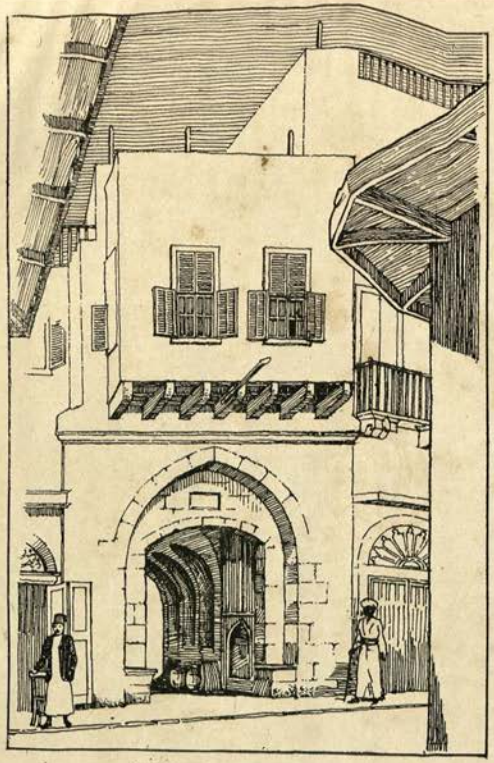
To study Oriental life in Alexandria, one must walk west or south from the Place Méhémet Ali, which is at once the focus of the whole city's traffic and the natural division between the European and Mohammedan quarters. Going southwards in the direction of the docks there is hardly a single picturesque feature to relieve the dismal squalor of the Rue des Sœurs, its

continuation in the Rue Ibrahim Premier, and the adjoining streets. Half the frontage is occupied by shabby little restaurants catering for the simple tastes of Tommy and Jack. Menus in absurd language advertise solid British dishes. And between many of these buildings are alleys decorated with the A.P.M.'s legend—"Out of Bounds to Troops." In this quarter one may find everything that is least attractive in the cosmopolitan life of a great seaport, without any of the mystery or glamour of the East.

But in the tortuous streets west of the Place, as one approaches the Palace of Ras-el-Tin, there are a few redeeming features. Occasionally the quaint decoration of an Arab mosque doorway greets the curious traveller as he turns into some odorous by-way or he sees some vista of mediæval vaulting through a pointed doorway half hidden by a shop-sign. Two such subjects occupied my pencil during my stay in Alexandria, but they are scarce. Compared with Cairo, Alexandria is indeed a poor place for an artist to visit if he wishes to study and sketch Eastern scenes.

While I was standing at the corner of two alleys, sketching the ancient doorway reproduced in this book, a group of ragged urchins came out of school and began to pester me, as Egpytian (and other) children will. An experienced parent myself, I parleyed with them in my native tongue, but was frankly amazed at their choice of vocabulary in reply. The names they called each other were obviously of military origin, but whether Young England or Young Australia was responsible I could not say. The balance inclines to the latter. When the English miss comes with her millionaire father to "do Egypt" after the war, she will, it is to be hoped, blush at English as it is spoken by the younger generation in Alexandria and Cairo. Not that these cities have a monopoly. I heard the same words used by a little boy in the bazaar of Fayyum town one day, and again in the remote oasis village of Kharga, far away south in the Libyan Desert.

But one does not expect to find either monuments of Arab art or choice examples of English diction in Alexandria. If one is eccentric enough to desire anything beyond amusements in that great city, one naturally turns to its famous history in classic days. The extent to which one is able to reconstruct in one's mind its appearance 2,000 years ago depends largely on one's



IN THE ARAB QUARTER, ALEXANDRIA.



DOORWAY OF A MOSQUE, ALEXANDRIA.

To face page 18.

imagination. A whole host of great names, from Euclid to Hypatia, from Alexander himself to Cæsar, are associated with its streets and its harbours.

But of the palaces that they lived in, the temples and the gardens, the beautiful Museum and Library, hardly a vestige remains. A visitor to Athens can readily conjure up the city as Pericles knew it in its Golden Age. A traveller standing on the Palatine Hill at Rome can almost picture its imperial glory. Ancient Alexandria, on the other hand, has nearly disappeared; not so utterly as Croton or Sybaris, but so far so that only with a certain amount of diligence can one trace its boundaries. The difficulty is enhanced by the fact that the natural configuration of the place has altered greatly since the beginning of the Christian era.

When Alexander founded the city in 331 B.C., he intended that it should be a first-class port as well as a great provincial centre of Greek culture. His site was admirably chosen to include a large harbour between the island of Pharos and the "mainland"—if the long strip between the Mediterranean and Lake Mareotis can be so styled. The island of Pharos is now all a part of that mainland, but its former limits may easily be described in relation to existing landmarks. Its eastern extremity is now indicated by the picturesque fort of Kaït Bey, erected by that famous builder during the fifteenth century. On this spot once stood the lofty lighthouse which, taking the name of *pharos* from the island, gave a name to all succeeding examples of its kind (*e.g.*, the modern Italian word *faro* signifies a lighthouse). It was reckoned one of the seven wonders of the world, and, if ancient historians can be trusted, was nearly 600 feet high. From this point the island extended westward to the modern lighthouse that forms a prominent object in the view of the city from the sea. Its frontage to the sea must have been very similar to the present line, and its area is now covered by the so-called Turkish quarter, the large military hospital of Ras-el-Tin, and the great Khedivial palace of the same name. (*Ras-el-Tin* means "promontory of figs.") Even to-day this is perhaps the most picturesque part of Alexandria. With its old fort, its golden rocks, and the blue sea breaking below, it resembles other bits of Mediterranean scenery in Southern Italy. One recalls the

Castel del Ovo at Naples and the rock-girt town of Gallipoli near Taranto.

From the island of Pharos a broad causeway on an embankment, the *Heptastadium*, extended to the mainland. In mediæval times this was used as a refuse-tip, till its width was increased to nearly a mile, and on the area so formed the present Arab quarter was eventually built.

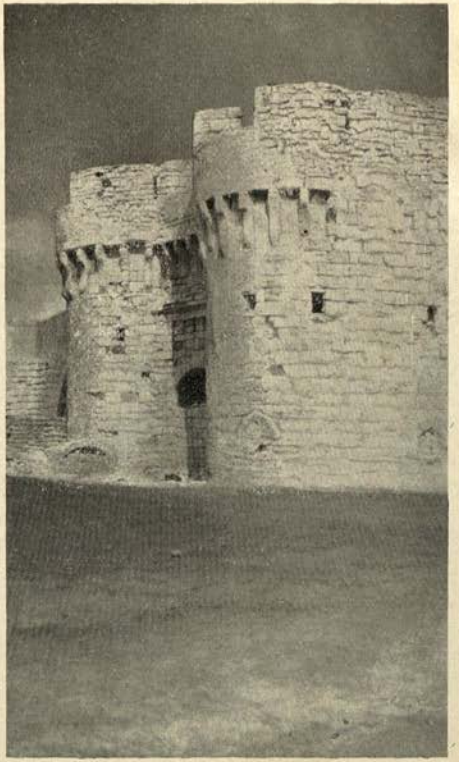
On either side of the *Heptastadium* was an enclosed harbour. That on the coast was called the Great Harbour, and is represented to-day by the bay known as the East Harbour, round which runs the broad modern Abbas II. Promenade. But the *Diabathra*, or breakwater, that separated it from the sea—almost connecting the modern Fort Silsileh on its promotory with Fort Kaït Bey on the island of Pharos—has gone, also the island of Antirrhodus. The western harbour, named *Eunostos*, occupied the older part of the large harbour now in use.

The great city itself lay on the mainland, and therefore on the site of the modern quarters best known to visitors. The Rue de la Porte Rosette, familiar to almost every soldier in the E.E.F., was the main artery of traffic more than 2,000 years ago, when gilded chariots took the place of our Staff cars. The Porte de Rosette actually marks the site of the former Canopic Gate, whence ran the road to the city of Canopus, near Aboukir. Near the present Gare de Ramleh, where khaki-clad warriors scramble in their thousands for trams to Mustapha or Sidi Bishr, there was the Forum, and not far from the modern Alhambra stood a more dignified theatre in ancient days, where a grave Greek chorus chanted in a setting of blue sea and sky. A little to the east was the *Regia*, the royal quarter, where the chief palaces and public buildings lay.

Farther eastwards was the large Jewish quarter, and beyond it extensive cemeteries, some of the oldest being near the modern station of Ibrahimiyeh. The ancient Hippodrome was quite near the present Sporting Club, which is thus very appropriately situated. Just at the east end of Mustapha Camp, between the barracks and the sea, was a Roman camp or fortress, and beyond this lay Augustus Cæsar's new suburb of Nicopolis, extending inland from Stanley Bay. (The familiar name of the railway junction of Sidi Gaber, the station for Mustapha Camp, is due



PALM-TREES IN GABBARI CAMP, ALEXANDRIA.



FORT OF KAÏT BEY, ALEXANDRIA.

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to the prominent mosque adjoining, where a Mohammedan saint of that name was buried.)

When Christianity gained a footing in the city, cemeteries were opened on the western fringe. The catacombs now frequently found in and near Gabbari Camp are of this period.

With copious references to classic authors one might attempt a reconstruction of the life of this great city during many centuries: its world-famed Library and Museum, its great scholars, and its marvellous buildings. One might trace the fortunes of the early Christians through countless struggles and massacres. But not in these pages. For most of us Alexandria was only a brief halt in our journeying, and we saw only the few remaining relics of her palmy days.

In addition to the solitary column known as Pompey's Pillar, there is one monument of the Roman period of unique interest. This is the magnificent tomb at Kômash-Shukâfah, a dusty hill honeycombed with catacombs, in a bend of the Mahmudiyeh Canal at the southern end of the city. As a burial-place this far surpasses anything in the catacombs near Rome. Alike in its elaborate plan (an ordered succession of rectangular and circular chambers), and in the details of its decoration (an extraordinary fusion of Roman and Egyptian architecture), it seems to indicate that some wealthy man intended to provide an ambitious depository for the ashes of himself and a whole line of descendants. It is thought that the tomb must have been in use for 150 to 200 years, but exact conjecture as to dates is impossible. Judging by the symbols and ornament used, the founder must have been of the Egyptian faith and not a Christian. The tomb lies far below the surface of the rock in which it has been excavated. One descends to it by means of a circular staircase, and this opens into a fine rotunda with a gallery and columns. The principal chambers are richly decorated with statuary and other sculpture. To an architect the significance of the whole design, as a unique example of the meeting of the two great monumental styles, is apparent enough, but even the most casual sight-seer must have found it the most interesting relic in the city.

A century ago two lofty obelisks stood near the place whence the trams for Ramleh now start. They had been brought from Heliopolis, another name familiar enough to the E.E.F. One

was eventually sent to London, and has since attained celebrity as "Cleopatra's Needle"; the other found its way to New York. Too many of Egypt's treasures have followed the same routes. The two magnificent obelisks might have lent some dignity to this traffic-centre if they had been allowed to remain, a dignity provided neither by the shabby flank of the Alhambra nor by the breathless crowd of soldiers and civilians scrambling for the trams.

But in the Municipal Museum one can most easily obtain an idea of Alexandria in its prime. The exhibits in the Egyptian rooms there, though interesting, are far inferior in number or value to those in the British and Cairo Museums. The bulk of the exhibits are naturally of Greek or Roman date, though in many cases strongly influenced by Egyptian tradition.

A recent article by a famous critic accuses the British public of only entering a museum or an art gallery with the oppressive consciousness that it is liable to have its mind improved, never with any idea of spontaneous enjoyment. This probably applies chiefly to the so-called "officer class" so far as the Army is concerned, for the average Tommy has not been so expensively educated as to have become ashamed of such things, and he visits a museum out of frank curiosity. Certainly, in the museums of Cairo and Alexandria one sees more of "other ranks," proportionately, than of officers, so perhaps the famous critic is right. But unless one is fortunate enough to penetrate to Luxor, 400 miles beyond Cairo, it is quite impossible to form the least idea of Ancient Egypt without recourse to the museums; for Cairo is an Arab city, and most of the old towns in the Delta have completely disappeared. And the number of men in the E.E.F. who have seen Luxor must be very small. This circumstance will perhaps exonerate me from blame for dragging a few references to the Alexandria Museum into a book that has no claim to be instructive, and therefore unpalatable.

There are various excursions that one may make east and west of Alexandria, given the time and the inclination. The most attractive is to Aboukir, some fifteen miles east of the city. Here one is supposed to gaze on the bay, where Nelson won his great victory, and sing "Rule, Britannia." As I went, perforce, alone, I had to forgo the latter part of the programme. In an

adjoining compartment of my train was a more fortunate R.A.M.C. officer who had attracted to himself a bevy of nurses, with whom he lunched and bathed on the rocks. No echoes of "Rule, Britannia" reached me from them during my lonely swim, so I assumed they were working out the details of the great fight with map and compass! The Admiral Nelson Hotel was closed, and only with difficulty was I able to obtain a glass of lemonade, to lubricate my sandwiches, at a desolate-looking restaurant on the beach.

In fact, though the bay was pretty enough in a harmless sort of way, there was nothing either in the scenery or in the village "to write home about," as Tommy says—nothing more than one expects to see in any part of the Mediterranean. But since these days Aboukir has seen great changes, and is now the home of a branch of the service which is generally regarded as particularly able to look after itself in the matter of amusements. It is even said that a certain famous concert-party has been attached to it, "for rations and discipline"!

I walked part of the way back from Aboukir with a half-hearted idea of seeing the remains of ancient Canopus. Somehow I missed those, and in any case very little is to be seen. But one crosses a tract of the fertile irrigated country that never fails to interest a newcomer to Egypt, with its creaking water-wheels and its quaint agricultural methods. Moreover, between Aboukir and Ramleh one passes the magnificent Khedivial château of Montaza in its pinewoods and rose-gardens, the most beautiful place on all the coast of Egypt, and now the most popular of convalescent homes for the E.E.F.

After rather more than a fortnight of sight-seeing in Alexandria, my orders at last arrived. I was instructed to "proceed to Tollygan Camp, Cairo," and "to report for duty to O.C. Sanitary Section 839" (or thereabouts). I worried needlessly over the trivial fact that there appeared to be no such place as "Tollygan Camp"—the name rather suggested South Wales. O.C. Details took it more calmly, and said brightly, "Well, evidently you must go to Cairo," a dictum that appeared sound. Careful study of a map in Baedeker revealed a certain "Polygon Camp" near Cairo, and thither I directed my swarthy coachman on arrival in that city. It was a long drive, and my reception was

unexpected, to put it mildly, for I knew not the Army and its ways.

"O.C. Sanitary Section 839" (or thereabouts) was eventually exhumed by one of his varlets. He was considerably my senior in point of years, and impressed me, after an hour's talk, as the one man who stood between the E.E.F. and ruin. But though I was fortunate in thus dropping straight into the very hub of the war, my own position was indeterminate. All that could be gathered was that I was in no way expected or required; that no vacancy existed, or was likely to exist, in the command of this important unit; and, in fine, that there was a mistake somewhere. For seven weeks more I enjoyed the privilege of almost complete idleness in Cairo. If I had been a "real" medical I should have been put into a hospital, but on this occasion I scored by being an outsider.

CHAPTER II

IN CAIRO

CAIRO is a city of so many varied aspects that it is difficult to sort out one's impressions into anything like reasonable sequence, after having visited it and lived in it several times during two years.

When D. and I arrived there in February, 1916, we made our way to the Continental Hotel, the *parvenu* but brilliant rival of Shepheard's famous establishment.

In many ways it is a revelation, to an Englishman who has never been out of Europe, to enter these buildings. In the first place many of us would feel rather overwhelmed, in times of peace, by the luxury and costliness of it all. In Cairo there is no satisfactory accommodation for the visitor of limited means, as in France, or Italy, or Austria. The contrast between these marble halls, with their herds of bowing attendants, and the cheap *pensions* or *bourgeois* hotels that have usually housed me in foreign cities nearer home is very marked.

The supercilious stare that the English society woman reserves for any neighbours who are not obviously blessed with her own income would spoil my dinner. But it is wonderful what a uniform does for one.

Throughout the past two years the atmosphere of Cairo must have been strangely different from that of any other great Army headquarters. Only once during that time—when a hostile aeroplane suddenly appeared from the desert and killed a few harmless civilians and natives with its bombs—has its whirl of gaiety been interrupted. While we have been anxiously thinking of wives and children left in London or Eastern England, during reports of raids by Zeppelins and Gothas and submarines, the Cairo streets have been brilliantly lit up, and the small part of the British Army stationed there has been immune from the

sights and sounds of war. During recent months there have been changes. The prohibitive price of coal has at last led to lighting restrictions, and there has been a steady movement of Staff officers and others towards Palestine.

For officers and men on "short leave in Egypt" from the desert, for convalescents, and for hospital patients, this unruffled calm is a great boon. Here one can really rest, either quietly enjoying the comforts and luxury of a good hotel or in more vigorous forms of gaiety. When I came down the line from Palestine in 1917, after six months of uninterrupted camp life, I spent most of my time between meals, for the first day or two at Shepheard's, wallowing in a succession of hot baths. On the other hand, I met a convalescent youth at the same time who informed me that his fortnight in Cairo had cost him £70—a strenuous convalescence!

Apart from the hotels, the chief military resort in Cairo is Groppi's, a large café, with a garden, in the centre of the city. The company here is much less exclusive. In Groppi's, colonels and subalterns, and sergeants and privates, and nursing sisters and other people's wives, and civilians and *effendis*, all jostle together at the little tables in friendly confusion. Once I even saw a girl in a *yashmak* there, but I am inclined to think that she was not a very nice girl.

Among out-of-door resorts, the favourite for officers is the Gezireh Sporting Club, on the beautiful island in the Nile, while "other ranks" mainly patronise the Ezbekiyeh Gardens, with their fine trees, restaurants, band, and Y.M.C.A.

Next in order of prominence after the brass-hats in Cairo were the Australians, or, as they are now commonly called, the Anzacs. This prominence was not due to their predominating numbers nor to their slouch hats. It was rather a matter of personality. Military discipline seems to run off an Australian like water off a duck's back. He will not only answer a question, but will favour you with all his views on that and allied topics, expressed in vigorous and unconventional language, as man to man. His well-known non-saluting pose in those early days was only typical of his attitude towards the *minutiæ* of military discipline in general.

Though there were no tourists in the country, even during

these early months, or at most a few Americans and presumably the usual spies, Egypt must have reaped a rich harvest from the Army, and most of that money has been spent in Alexandria and Cairo. Had one been able to foresee the war, I can think of few more profitable ways of profiteering than to float a soda-water manufactory in one of these cities. But it has been the Greek who has scored in most cases. Not only in the towns, but in the most unexpected backwaters, his genius for trading has shown extraordinary brilliance. I once visited a desert outpost on the borders of Fayyum, occupied by a platoon of infantry, and in a hut of matting adjoining them I found the inevitable Greek canteen!

All the accumulated arrears of money that were paid out to the Anzacs and the British troops who had been fighting for months at Gallipoli came in a great windfall to Cairo and Alexandria before the movement to the Canal began. A proportion—probably a small proportion—of these men were married, and there is a vast difference between the married man and the bachelor in matters of economy. But even the Benedicts had been away from shops and canteens for months, whereas the boys who composed the bulk of the Territorial divisions from Suvla, and above all the Australians with their trade-union wages, had no scruple at all in squandering enormous sums on worthless "souvenirs," on trinkets and handkerchiefs for their lady-loves, and in interminable drinks and drives. They had come out of the jaws of death, they might be returning there at any moment, and they made the most of the present, as only soldiers can. Nobody would be so pharisaical as to grudge them their fling, but one could hardly feel pleased to see English sovereigns, or their paper equivalent, pouring so profusely into the rapidly swelling pockets of oily Levantines. It was a great chance for the Greek, and he rose to the occasion.

Prices in Egypt must be high even in peace-time, for residents say that the piastre (2½d.) is only equal in value to a penny in England. But that applies especially to articles costing only a few pence. In other cases, even allowing for the phenomenal rise caused by the duration of the war, enormous profits must have been made out of the open-handed soldier.

The lounges of the principal hotels and the pavements of the

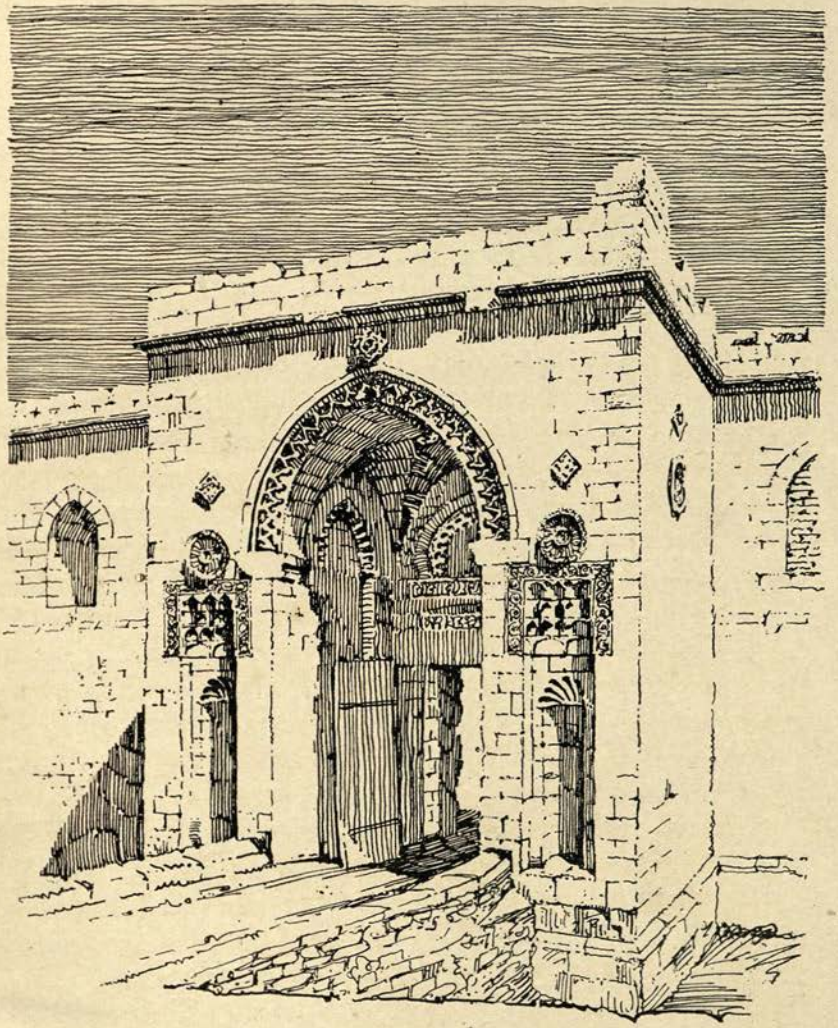
shopping streets in the European quarter were brightened by the gay frocks of English wives before an embargo was put upon this category of unnecessary luxuries. But these ladies were by the same order forbidden to leave the country, and, as the Army slowly rolled Eastward, a small party of grass-widows was left behind. A fashionable tourist from England would not notice or appreciate the presence of a few additional English-women in a hotel. But wives are women, and after a few months of undiluted soldiers, sand, and camels, one finds the sight of pretty frocks and dainty children as satisfying as anything in Cairo.

The most fashionable of Cairo's other hotels has fallen to the craze for renting these buildings that has provided material for so many bad jokes, in and out of Parliament, in England, and it houses G.H.Q. All the luxurious trappings have been swept away, and unrelieved khaki reigns everywhere. The swish of petticoats and the reek of scent is hardly perceptible to the most acute visitor to this austere establishment. At Heliopolis the Army has taken over one of the largest and most gorgeous hotels in the world, and many other buildings in Cairo—Government offices, barracks, private houses—have all been pressed into the service, especially for hospital purposes.

The Citadel and Kasr-en-Nil Barracks are old and rambling, especially the Citadel, which dates back to the brave days of Saladin. It was commenced in 1176-7, according to Professor Lane-Poole, and additions were made to it right up to modern times. Saladin must have had in mind the Crusaders' strong-holds in Palestine when he planned these frowning walls and bastions on their great rock platform. The finest view of the Citadel is to be obtained from the Mokattam Hills.

The barracks at Kasr-en-Nil are finely situated on the banks of the Nile. The main block is grouped round a courtyard with some architectural pretensions, but the gilded saloons where the officers live are tawdry.

Abbassia, or Abbasiyeh, as it is variously spelt according to the system of transliteration adopted, was laid out by the Khedive Abbas I. in 1849. Its exact boundaries are not very easy to define nowadays, nor is it very well planned, though many of its streets may be called *boulevards* by reason of their width and



PORTAL OF MOSQUE OF ZAHIR, CAIRO.

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their welcome lining of trees. About a mile east of Cairo Station lies the beautiful but dilapidated mosque of El Zahir or Daher, the last mediæval building on the north of Cairo. This may perhaps be reckoned as the beginning of Abbassia proper. The roads in the latter area are short and wide, between the tram-lines and the desert, and are lined with large villas of very varied design. Many are inhabited by prosperous *effendis*. Externally these houses are quasi-European, like their trim boundary-walls and the macadamised side-walks with iron electric light standards. Many have a garage attached containing some expensive car. Others are more gorgeous in their exteriors, and the architect has evidently had Arab models in his mind. Some are rather shabby, for shabbiness is characteristic of many European buildings in Eastern cities. But at the doors of these large villas one usually sees a Soudanese *boab* or *concierge*, and the ladies who issue forth on shopping excursions are more or less veiled, as prescribed by Mohammedan law. From their elegant shoes and stockings one gathers that, once indoors, they probably dress to match their aggressively European furniture. East and West combine badly in these *effendis'* households, and there is no poetry in the combination. If one takes a walk through the narrow, dirty streets of Demirdash, one finds a drab squalor, without either European cleanliness or Oriental picturesqueness.

The large mosque on the main road is the Fadawiyeh Mausoleum, and was erected in the time of the famous Kaït Bey, about 1481 A.D. The great dome is carried on richly decorated "stalactite" pendentives—the most striking feature of Arab construction—and covers a fine interior. The floor is carpeted, for the mosque is still used for worship, and is brilliantly lit on the occasion of religious festivals.

Just beyond this mosque one reaches the very extensive area of the Abbassia Barracks, the chief home of the British garrison in Cairo. The buildings near the main road—Red Barracks on the left, Zafaran Barracks on the right, and Talbot Block beyond—are somewhat antiquated, and not as desirable in many respects as one could wish. But the magnificent new barracks beyond them are probably the finest structures of their kind in existence anywhere. They are characteristic of the British Army in their

solid qualities, their effect of permanent stability, their absolute insistence on good materials, and their fitness for the job in hand. The new buildings at Abbassia suggest that Britain has sat down very deliberately and heavily in Cairo, without any intention of moving during the next few hundred years.

The adjoining twin blocks, where Cavalry and Infantry officers are normally housed, are crowned by low domes distinguishing them from the larger blocks occupied by the men and by administrative rooms. Towards the road they are covered by flowering creepers and shrubs; towards the parade-ground is a little garden with a fountain in its centre, and two grey monkeys scrambling over an arch. In the entrance-hall is a silent Oriental, who removes any dust from one's boots with a long-handled feather-duster.

For some weeks one of these buildings was my home, a R.A.M.C. mess. Conversation there was chiefly conducted in the Scottish tongue, for, as I gradually discovered in the fulness of time, most R.A.M.C. officers hail from north of the Tweed.

Life there in 1916 was not in any way strenuous. To an outsider it appeared that most of the medicals had no more to do than I, who was admittedly lost. Cairo and Alexandria had become huge hospital centres during the Gallipoli campaign, but now their supply of raw material had ceased, and the E.E.F.—or its predecessors in those days, the M.E.F. and the Force in Egypt—was in a state of transition.

For the first month I spent most of my time in pottering about the camps near Abbassia. But all available days were spent in Cairo itself, making the most of opportunities, that even a wealthy tourist might envy, for thoroughly studying its fascinating Arab buildings and the wonderfully Oriental atmosphere of its bazaars. There was time, too, for a flying visit to distant Luxor, as important to a student of ancient Egypt as Cairo is to a mediæval enthusiast.

Then at last a job was found for me. Besides being given the temporary command of a Sanitary Section, I was appointed a Deputy Acting Assistant Showman of Sanitary Appliances, an appointment which does not appear on any War Establishment, I may say.

On a patch of desert just beyond the barracks was a wired

enclosure, where a zealous sanitarian had rigged up a series of working models of improvised appliances for cooking, conservancy, bathing, and disinfection, suitable for use in Egypt. The idea was excellent. It had been evolved in France quite early in the war, and as time passed many ingenious devices were added. The object of most of these exhibitions, of which three at least were installed in Egypt, was to show, to both military and medical officers and men, what could be done in the field with the minimum of materials. Empty cresol-drums and kerosene-tins, mortar made with sand and chopped straw, and bricks of the same material, were the chief ingredients. On the whole these exhibitions were very useful, but they sometimes served to advertise absurd "inventions" that were quite useless under field conditions, suggested usually by medical officers whose knowledge of practical possibilities must have been absolutely nil. Someone once said to me, rather wittily, that sanitation in Egypt had come to consist of cresol-drums and mud bricks. Without them no scheme would be considered by the authorities.

Some sort of experimental station might be installed, possibly in connection with a Sanitary Demonstration Centre like that at Abbassia, just described, where inventions—whether by Colonels or privates—could be properly tested under practical conditions before adoption, as is done for agriculture in experimental farms.

But most things regarding conditions in Egypt were a sealed book to me as I conducted parties of veteran Generals or breezy Anzacs round my little patch at Abbassia, and I learned far more from them than I taught anybody in my capacity of showman.

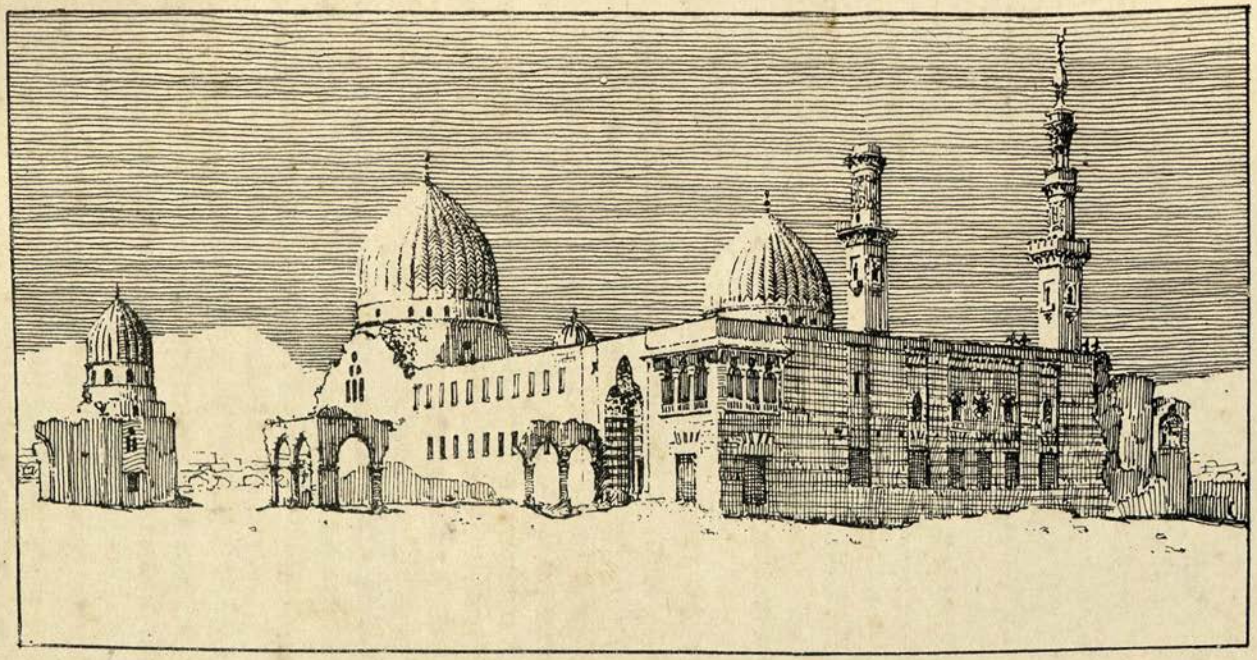
The Abbassia Barracks are planted on the fringe of the desert, which extends from them eastwards towards the red cliffs of Gebel Ahmar, some 400 feet high. From this rocky hill one has a magnificent view, embracing most of Cairo, the Libyan Desert far away beyond them, the beginnings of the Arabian Desert at one's feet, and the Delta between the two, with white sails dotted over its green expanse of fields and trees. On the left rise the minarets and cupolas of the beautiful Tombs of the Caliphs. If one turns round and looks eastward there is nothing alive to be seen, simply a series of hummocks of reddish rock and yellow sand. For, though so near civilisation on the one side, one could

walk eastwards over a waterless and uninhabited desert to the shores of the Gulf of Suez, seventy-five miles away, passing only a few Bedouin tents. These Bedouins may be seen driving herds of goats into Abbassia, and appear to be very poor. The women are dressed in the usual rusty black garment of their class. Over this desert there runs the old Suez road, with forts at intervals, formerly the route of pilgrims to Mecca and travellers to Suez and India. But now, when the Sacred Carpet leaves Cairo with pomp and ceremony for Mecca, it travels prosaically by train from Abbassia sidings.

In the whole area there is only one object of historical interest, the tomb-mosque of El Adil Tumanbay, erected in the year 1501, just before the Turkish conquest of Egypt. It is so well preserved that I, like most soldiers in Abbassia, imagined at first that it was a modern building. Whereas the neighbouring tomb-mosque of Fadawiyeh, already described, is chiefly notable for its interior, the beautiful cupola of the later example is decorated with one of those delicate floral patterns that one finds in several Cairo buildings of the period, and the whole design is of graceful proportions. But the woodwork of doors and shutters is of rough boarding, and the interior is so disappointing that it is much better not to enter, for this cannot be regarded as typical of Arab decoration. I have always been puzzled why this mosque should have been placed at this particular point, but possibly the proximity of the ancient highway may be the explanation.

Heliopolis, as it is generally called, or the Oasis of New Heliopolis, to be strictly accurate, is at once the most popular resort of soldiers and the most remarkable example of modern town-planning to be seen in the neighbourhood of Cairo.

The name is somewhat misleading. Old Heliopolis, the site of the ancient city of that name, lies three miles north of the new suburb. The ruins cover an area of some three square miles, and the position is marked by a tall obelisk. As its name implies, Heliopolis was a centre of sun-worship. Authorities differ as to the period when the city was founded or the date when the sun-temple was built, but the first event is commonly attributed to the Fourth Dynasty (*c.* 2900 to 2750 B.C.) and the second to the reigns of Amenemhet I. and Sesostrias I. (*c.* 2000 B.C.). In any case it is therefore clear that this is one of the most ancient sites



EXTERIOR OF BARKUKIYEH, TOMBS OF THE CALIPHS.

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of Egypt, and the obelisk a relic of one of Egypt's oldest buildings. Heliopolis was the predecessor of Cairo, which is a comparatively modern city, unknown before the Christian era. It was known to the Hebrews as *On*, and in Genesis xli. 45 we read that Pharaoh gave Joseph "to wife Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah" (Egypt. *Pete-pre*, "he whom the sun-god Re has given"), "priest of On." The priests of the temple were learned men, and for centuries their reputation spread all over the then known world. Their temple has practically disappeared, thanks to the fanaticism of a mediæval mob. But one of the two obelisks that Sesostris raised in front of his father's building still stands. It is 66 feet high and of red Assouan granite. On each of its four sides appear similar hieroglyphic inscriptions recording the facts of its erection. Its companion appears to have been destroyed in the twelfth century.

When the Greek traveller Herodotus visited Egypt about 460 to 455 B.C., he went to Heliopolis to consult the priests as to the origin of the ancient Egyptians. In his famous History (II. 3) he says that: "The Heliopolitans have the reputation of being the best skilled in history of all the Egyptians."

Strabo, who followed him in the first century B.C., states that the temple still existed in fair condition, though the remainder of the city was largely ruined and the priests had gone. Only a few guides for tourists still remained!

But the neighbourhood of Heliopolis boasts of another venerable tradition that connects it with sacred history. In the hamlet of Mataria, only a few hundred yards from the obelisk just mentioned, is a chapel dedicated to the Virgin, and near it an ancient tree and a spring. Even in the days of the Crusades this was a famous place of pilgrimage. When Kinglake was in the *Khan* at Gaza some seventy years ago, waiting for his camels to take him across Sinai, he describes the arrival of Moldavian pilgrims from "the shrine of the Virgin in Egypt," bound for Jerusalem in their tour of the Holy Places. At Mataria indulgences were, and are, obtainable. Travellers have written of their journeys thither since the fifteenth century. The spring was regarded as miraculous at the beginning of the fourth century. But the most important and interesting tradition recognises this as the refuge of the Holy Family after their flight from Herod,

adding that ". . . when the blessed Mary with her Child entered the temple of Heliopolis, all the idols fell down on their faces and were broken in pieces." Although the evidence adduced in favour of this tradition is not convincing, there is every reason to regard the place as a suitable refuge. It lay on the most likely route for the fugitives to follow, and was the centre of a large Jewish colony at the time. But whether the old legend can be substantiated or not, Mataria may well have been their home for a time, and the modern tripper should enter the unprepossessing church to study the mural paintings representing six scenes on the journey and after its conclusion. The artist evidently knows the desert well, and the details of his background are refreshingly true to the ancient life of the East.

The plain between the ruins of Heliopolis and the modern districts of Kubbeh and Abbassia has been the scene of two great battles. In 1517 the Turks, under the Osman Sultan Selim of Constantinople, defeated Tumanbay (a relative of the Sultan whose tomb-mosque at Abbassia has already been described) on this ground, and Egypt passed under the sway of the Turks. Nearly 300 years later, in 1800, the French General Kléber, with 10,000 troops defeated 60,000 Orientals here, and for a time regained possession of Cairo. Such are, in brief, the historical associations of Heliopolis.

But New Heliopolis is the most aggressively modern place in the Cairo district. It was laid out by a Belgian company in 1906, with the object of attracting wealthy European officials and *effendis* to settle there. Broad streets with gardens and trees allow the desert winds to blow through, and two lines of fast electric cars rush the inhabitants out from their place of business in the minimum of time. Most noticeable of all its features, however, is the style of architecture adopted for its buildings, if it can be called a style. Imagine the White City transplanted from Shepherd's Bush into the desert, with a few sweet-smelling shrubs scattered about, and all the canals and gondolas omitted, and you have a very fair idea of New Heliopolis. Even a switchback is there in the grounds of Luna Park. Early in 1916 the streets were packed with Anzacs, crowding into bars and cafés or listening to the various bands. Since then the military element has shrunk to a mere handful, but the most striking attractions



YASHMAKS.



THE BAB ZUWEILEH, CAIRO.



A STREET IN HELIOPOLIS.



THE MOSQUE OF TUMANBAI, ABBASSIA.

To face page 34.

of the place, the open-air cinemas, still remain. One may sit on the terrace of a hotel or a café for an hour or two any evening, watching "the pictures" unfolding their blood-curdling dramas, for the price of a cup of coffee or a drink. To be seen at its best, Heliopolis should be visited some night when the moon is at its full; in daylight the effect is tawdry.

Very different in its surroundings was the great camping area near the Pyramids, known as Mena Camp and inhabited by the Australians. Mena is the name given to a half-legendary, half-historical personage who flourished some time between 3400 B.C. and 4400 B.C., according to different chronologers. He first united all Egypt under his kingship, for previously one King had ruled the Delta and another the Nile Valley from modern Cairo to the present Soudan frontier at Wadi Halfa. Mena Camp has now been disused for a long time, but thousands of men and horses were once there. The site was not an ideal one, for it lay so low that any form of drainage was difficult. But the most Philistine of soldiers must have felt that he was living in a place remarkable for its historical associations even in so ancient a land as Egypt. Endless photographs were taken of Anzacs and their tents with the Pyramids in the background. The evening view from here across the green Nile Valley to Cairo, rising with its many minarets against the bold cliffs of the Mokattam, is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen.

Close to this camp is the Mena House Hotel, used for some time as a staff school by the Army, and previously for medical purposes.

Roda Island has a certain charm of its own, and some historical interest. It is largely covered with old gardens, and in one of these, near its southern extremity, is the famous Nilometer. The more one learns of Egypt, the more one understands how the Nile means everything to the country, as much as it ever did in the days when these old Cufic inscriptions were carved, twelve hundred years ago.

I return to the old mosque of El Zahir on the Abbassia road. It is known both officially and colloquially by a variety of names —"the Old Slave Market," "the Bakery," "the Abattoir." But to an architect it can only be a mosque, for its antiquity and its purpose are apparent even as one passes in the tram. It was

built by the great sultan Ez Zahir Beybars in 1267-69, and in those days lay outside the city walls. In the early part of the following century, during the Christian persecutions excited by the Crusades, a Christian was discovered with packets of naphtha and pitch, about to set fire to the building. When put to the torture, he confessed that this was his purpose. In Napoleonic times it was used as a bakehouse for the troops, and the great ovens that were then built are still to be seen. Before the war it was used by our Army as a slaughter-house, more recently for various purposes by the A.S.C. Almost the only traces of its former rich decoration are to be seen in the beautiful arched portal on the south—with a vaulted roof under which motor-lorries laden with cabbages and "Maconochie" used to run every morning—and in the very similar doorways on north and west. The interior courtyard is a yard or so below the level of the present street, and on the east side one may still decipher the vaulting-bays of the chief *liwân* or sanctuary, with the rounded niche in the centre pointing towards Mecca.

So much for the military side of Cairo. Of its modern civilian aspect it is difficult to write in these days for anyone who has never seen it without the crowds of khaki. But when the war is over there will be numbers of men, now in the Army, who see no vision of making their fortune in England, and no prospect of returning "to a safe job at home"; possibly they have very little desire to do so. Many of these are looking to our colonies and dependencies for their new start in life. There are others whose outlook has been greatly changed by years of life in the open air and by travel overseas. And to many of us Cairo is interesting as a possible bourne in the dim future when peace is restored and we return to our normal pursuits. A villa in Gezireh or Maadi or Zeitoun, among banks of flowers and bathed in perpetual sunshine, would not be an altogether despicable home.

And even without any such incentive, one naturally studies with interest the English community in Cairo, so far as it is visible to the naked eye. There are the men of the higher branches of the Civil Service, the exact counterpart of the "indispensable" class as one sees it in Whitehall. There are the Scots, especially Scots engineers, who seem to flourish in every part of the world,

with keen brains and plenty of perseverance. There are business men, immersed in cotton or machinery, often with North-Country habits and accents. And there are the few *savants*, the archæologists, whose work seems to some of us the most interesting of all. In Cairo, Alexandria, Mansourah, and other towns, the little English colony seems very self-contained, with the inevitable golf-course, tennis-club, and Anglican Church. Cairo has an English quarter in the island of Gezireh (Egypt. *gezireh* signifies "island") inhabited by the more fortunate of our officials, and it is surprisingly English in its appearance. Some of the roads, with their neat tree-lined pavements, their wooden garden-gates and "tradesmen's entrance," might be in Wimbledon or Beckenham or some other prosperous London suburb. One looks for the legend "No Bottles." A rather un-English feature is a prominent brass plate on the gate of each comfortable villa bearing the owner's name. At home this practice is restricted to professional men. Children are to be seen, in moderate numbers, as one would expect in so select a neighbourhood, but unmistakably English wherever one meets them, and they appear healthy enough. Only in the faces of some of these English women does the strain of the climate seem to leave much impression—an effect of listnessness and a thinness of features.

In Cairo, as elsewhere in North Africa, one hears the usual dreary complaints of British commercial slackness, of scarce and complacent commercial travellers, of inability to grasp the crudeness of native taste for bright colours, of disinclination to sell goods by local weights and measures. Whether or how far this is true is beyond my ability to say. Apparently "peaceful penetration" from the usual quarter was busy enough in Egypt before the war. Yet one ray of light seems to be appearing in the after-war prospects, for it is difficult to see how our antediluvian British system of weights and measures can survive much longer against some form of the metric system. When we throw overboard our pennyweights and scruples and fluid ounces and perches and poles and fathoms, to say nothing of yards and bushels, we may hope to gain a little ground in our trading with the so-called backward races.

One feature that is common to all official life in Cairo always strikes a visitor as very curious. The whole official world and

his wife (or wives) go to Alexandria or some other seaside resort for several months in the summer, and so far as one can gather, it is only with great difficulty that any business can be transacted during that time. Some system of overlapping leave would surely meet the case, but in this respect Europeans seem to have adopted the comfortable Oriental equivalent of *dolce far niente.*

French, Belgians, and Italians are all very numerous in Cairo, the two former filling many official and financial positions, the latter ranging over everything, from the traditional ice-cream to the higher walks of archæology.

The Greek swarms everywhere, and forms a link between Europe and Africa. But the line is not clearly defined, and when a European dons a *tarbush* he is not always distinguishable from the *effendi.* An *effendi* is not exactly the counterpart of a "gentleman" in England, nor of a *bourgeois* in France. He is an "educated" man—a man who can read and write. You often hear an engine-driver addressed as *effendi!* He is a curious product of civilisation, and perplexes a foreigner. One thinks of Baroudi in Robert Hichen's story "Bella Donna," and wonders! Certainly it is clear that the *effendi* does not want whole battalions of young Englishmen to be imported to fill minor jobs in Egypt. He is waking up as he becomes more educated, and though he may be well content with the immense prosperity that English administration, engineering, and agricultural science has brought him, he aspires to hold a small Government position as keenly as any German in the Fatherland.

One splendid product of our system is the Cairo policeman; whether on foot or mounted on a glossy Arab charger, he is irreproachably smart. His white uniform is invariably speckless, and if he enters a tramcar (although it is usually above suspicion), he will spread a handkerchief on the wooden seat before sitting down. His salute is a model of correctness, and on the parade-ground he drills with the machine-like movements of a Guardsman. The fire-brigades, with their red-painted vehicles and folding doors, their brass helmets, blue uniforms, and clanging bells, are evidently based on English models.

The tramway system of the city, chiefly under Belgian management, is also very efficient. One of the lines is laid over the old Khalig Canal, filled in quite recently. The British soldier

can travel any distance on a tram, within the city, for 2 milliemes (½d.). But the conductor always pretends that he has no small change, and relies on getting at least 1 millieme for himself if the soldier has to ask for change. One link between old Cairo and the modern quarters is to be found in the costume of its womenkind. A stranger to the East is always immensely impressed by the *yashmak* and the *habara*, the long black robe that Mohammedan custom has devised to conceal the charms of the fair. The older women still wear it more or less in its prescribed form, and in such cases it successfully shrouds all contours from head to heel. There is a passage in the "Arabian Nights" that runs: "He who hath not seen Cairo hath not seen the world. . . . Her women are as the bright-eyed Houris of Paradise." Yes, and they know it! The younger ones, those whom England would call the "minxes," are not by any means satisfied with the old-fashioned *habara* such as their mothers and grandmothers wear. A close-cut black skirt, short enough to display a reasonable amount of ankle and dainty shoe, is worn with a gay and probably *décolleté* blouse. An abbreviated *habara* covers a high coiffure and as much of neck and blouse as the presence of unfriendly critics may require, and a white *barku* or *yashmak*, a veil of muslin, hangs over the lower part of the face and downwards to the waist. Whether this partial veiling adds to the attraction of the sex it is difficult to say; at all events, one does see a great number of beauties, possessing every art of *espiéglerie*, in certain parts of Cairo. Round the jewellers' shops near the Khan-el-Khalili, in the scent bazaar across the Mouski, in the Mouski itself, or at the tram-stations, there is always a pretty face laughing behind a *yashmak*, a face generally as white as or whiter than an Anglo-Egyptian woman's, for these Cairene girls live very much indoors.

But the characteristic features of Eastern life in Cairo have been so often and so admirably described that there is no need to add any amateur criticism. In the books of Edward Lane or the more modern volumes by Professor Lane-Poole the Oriental aspect of the city is treated in great detail.

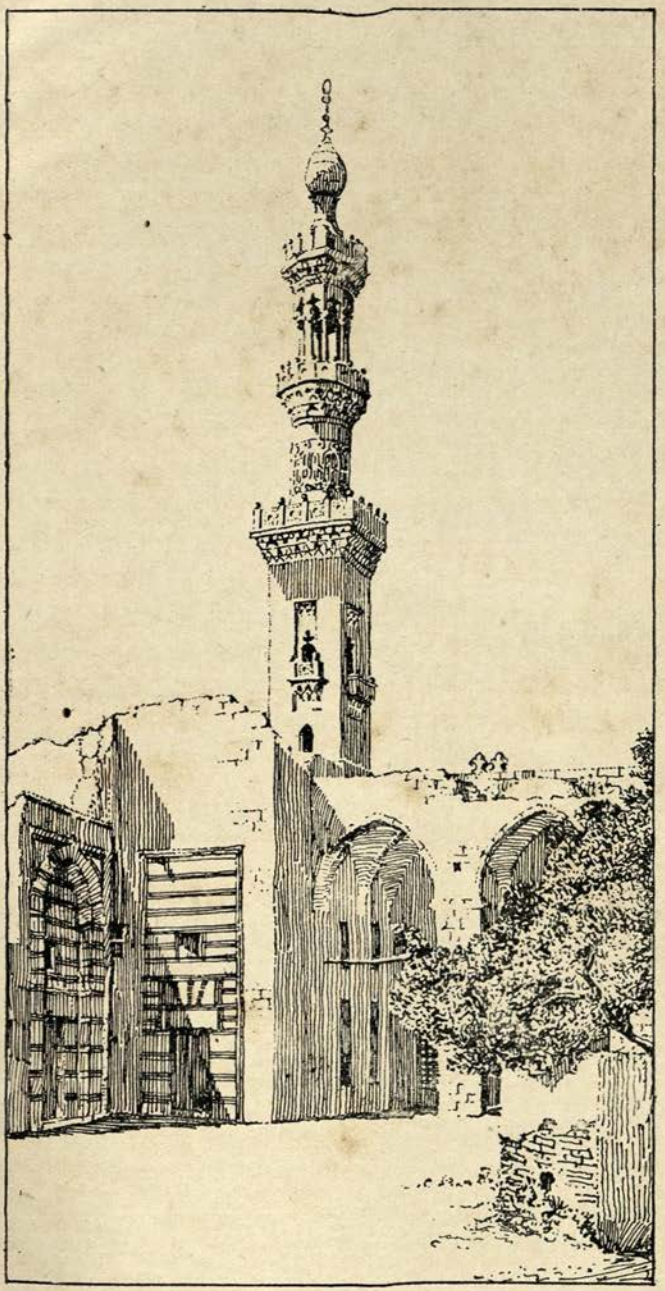
In Alexandria one can only study the glories of the past in the municipal museum. In Cairo, one of the most wonderful cities the Middle Ages ever produced, the whole story of its great-

ness lies in streets and mosques little changed from their original form. There is a Museum of Arab Art that should on no account be missed by a visitor, a remarkable collection of beautiful examples of mediæval craftsmanship. But in order to understand this carved woodwork, these gorgeous hanging lamps of glass, these fascinating screens of *musharabiyeh* work, one must first be familiar with the buildings they once adorned.

In Cairo there are some three hundred old mosques, besides old houses and other relics of bygone days. A soldier who comes all unsuspecting to his sight-seeing is conducted by his guide to the Citadel, where he is probably shown the great mosque of Mohammed Ali, the so-called "Blue Mosque of Rifaiyeh at the bottom of the hill, and its neighbour the mosque of Sultan Hassan. Thousands of soldiers who have had the luck to visit Cairo must have seen these three and no others. The meagre kit allowed to Tommy by "Desert Column" does not even permit of the proverbial Field-Marshal's baton being concealed in his haversack, much less a copy of Baedeker. But a visitor who wishes to take up the mosques of Cairo more seriously should also carry the English edition of Joanne's guide to the city.

In lieu of Baedeker, Tommy is usually reduced to hiring one of those persuasive and unqualified touts who pester one in the streets near the big hotels, most of whom, for some occult reason, lay claim to the name of "Moses." And he is taken to the three mosques I have mentioned, though only the last of the three is a genuine example of Arab art. The great mosque on the Citadel hill is an exotic, copied by a Greek architect from a model in Constantinople sixty years ago. Magnificently situated, impressive in its outline if seen from a distance, gorgeously decorated, it is none the less a foreign product, and its interior is a blaze of vulgarity. The Rifaiyeh Mosque just below was only completed two years before the war. It is a creditable design on historical Arab lines and on the grand scale, but essentially modern in general effect. And in miscalling it the "Blue Mosque," Moses is simply confusing it with the real Blue Mosque—the old mosque of Ibrahim Agha or Aksounkor in the Chareh Bab-el-Wazir, not very far away.

But the visitor who is thus misled by Moses does see one glorious example of mediæval art in the trio, the mosque of



INTERIOR OF BARKUKIYEH, TOMBS OF THE CALIPHS.

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Sultan Hassan. From all sides except the Citadel Square its vast exterior is plain and forbidding, but the lofty entrance-portal, the beautiful vestibule within, and above all the great open court or *sahn*, are among the finest things in all Cairo. Moreover, there is a frieze in decorated plaster, with texts from the Koran interlaced with a running floral pattern, that is one of the most lovely masterpieces of Arab art.

I have no wish to pose as the superior person in thus criticising the average soldier's itinerary. But anyone who has a real delight in the charm of these old Cairo buildings, a delight that grows and grows with every week spent in wandering with camera and sketch-book through dim-lit mosques and ancient streets, can but regret that Moses so often fails to show Tommy the best things in this wonderful city.

He might start, for example, at the point where the Chareh-el-Bayoumi leaves the tram-line from Abbassia. Passing down that long and busy old thoroughfare, he would see undiluted Eastern life until, after walking half-a-mile or so, he would reach the Bab-el-Foutouh, one of the gates of the mediæval city. Then he might climb the steps to the top of the old wall, and walk along above the great courtyard of the mosque of El Hakim to another gate, the Bab-en-Nasr, or Gate of Victory. Returning to the Bab-el-Foutouh, and following his original direction, he would pass a whole succession of picturesque scenes, turning to the right, perhaps, to visit the beautifully restored mosque of Abu Bekr, then the twelfth-century mosque of El Akmar, and shortly afterwards he would reach a group of buildings which has no rival in the city.

These are the mosques and mausoleums of Kalaoun, Barkuk, and En-Nasr, three of Arab Egypt's most famous rulers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A few hundred yards to the left is the beautiful loggia of the Beit-el-Kadi ("the Cadi's house"). As one proceeds onwards to the Mouski, one passes the Khan-el-Khalili, where the most interesting bazaars are situated. Across the Mouski, one is close to the great mosque-university of El Azhar, crowded with turbaned students from every part of the Orient. By continuing on one's original line one reaches the twin mosques and mausoleum of El Ghuri, a wonderful Arab house (the Beit-el-Gamal ed-Din), a little to the

left, and finally another gateway, the eleventh-century Bab-Zuweileh, with the large mosque of El Muayyad adjoining. Here one should bear to the left, and, after passing a succession of interesting mosques and quaint Arab dwellings in the Chareh-el-Tabbaneh, one finally arrives in the neighbourhood of the Citadel.

In this walk, a matter of two and a half miles, one has seen the cream of Arab Cairo, in spite of having missed Ibn Touloun, and one or two other beautiful buildings. The mosques one has passed contain as fine examples of decoration and design as any others, and the old gates and houses are the best of their kind in the city. To visit every building on this line of route in one day would be a great strain on one's capacity for sight-seeing, but a soldier on "short leave in Egypt" has little time to spare.

This is no rival to the tourist handbooks, and there is no reason for referring to the Pyramids, "Old Cairo" with its Coptic churches, the Egyptian Museum, the Nile, the Barrage, or Cairo's many other familiar attractions. I remember that my first evening in the city was partly devoted to a rapid promenade through its seamier quarters, under the very capable guidance of an Australian private whom I had known in London when we were both working at architecture. In an hour I had seen enough to last me "for the duration." When an Eastern city makes up its mind to provide a parade of immorality, it is usually successful, and for sheer squalid beastliness there are streets in Cairo, in those days often crowded with khaki, that it would be hard to beat. One does not need to be an architect to appreciate the real charm of Oriental Cairo, and that charm is not to be found in the seedy slums where Europeans take their pleasures at their own risk.

There are other slums, as, for instance, those between the mosques of Ibn Touloun, Kaït Bey, and Sangar-el-Ghaoulli, where mobs of noisy children interfere with one's legitimate sight-seeing.

But in the bazaars—where green-turbaned sheikhs shuffle by and shrouded beauties with lustrous eyes loiter among quaint booths laden with rare perfumes or delicate jewellery—where, indeed, little has changed during many centuries; among the

desolate tombs of the Caliphs out on the desert sands; and, above all, in the dim interiors of mosques glittering with costly marbles—there the charm of Cairo must be evident to the dullest understanding. If, on the other hand, the reader's tastes incline to landscapes and rural scenes rather than to town life, he will see a stretch of desert as lonely and as impressive as any in Egypt by crossing the *Gebel Ahmar* (the "Red Hill"), near Abbassia, or he will find in the lovely lane that runs from Kubba to Mataria, through green pastures and brilliant gardens, all the attractions of a cultivated countryside.

CHAPTER III

THE FAYYUM

WHEN some seven weeks had rolled by since my arrival in Cairo, and just as I was beginning to feel at home among its mosques, new orders came. This time I was instructed to proceed to —— Camp near —— two days later. I carefully scanned the short typewritten message in search of any pitfalls, gins, or other natural obstacles. Everything seemed "all correct," as the special constables say. There actually was such a camp and such a district. Moreover, the imposing string of initials and figures giving the "authority for the posting" was, at least, as much above suspicion as Cæsar's wife.

For more than fourteen months I was attached to a certain division, moving with it to the Canal, thence across Sinai into Palestine, and finally saying good-bye to it in the desolate Wadi-el-Ghuzze at midsummer, 1917. It was a Territorial division, one of those that had landed at Suvla, and had therefore been in Egypt some months before I arrived.

In the spring of 1916 the three Infantry brigades of the division were scattered over a long line west of the Nile, and formed a part of the so-called Western Frontier Force. As a matter of fact, it was hundreds of miles (except on the coast) from the dotted line that represents the frontier on the map, being concentrated at various points covering the approaches to the cultivated areas in the Delta and the Nile Valley. The nondescript army of the Senussi had been defeated.

The question of the Western Frontier is explained in more detail in Chapter VII. At the moment it is enough to say that one of the strategic points defended by this force was the very important oasis of Fayyum, renowned since the beginning of history as one of the most favoured and valuable parts of the whole country.

Egypt on the map appears as a territory that is nearly square, measuring rather less than 600 miles east to west, and rather more from north to south, But the map is most misleading. Of this enormous area, only a small fraction is inhabited. The Delta itself is all, or nearly all, under cultivation, also the Nile Valley as far as Assouan, beyond which the strip of cultivation is very narrow. The whole of the remaining area is arid desert, impossible to irrigate or fertilise, except the oases in the west. Most of these oases—Siwa, Kharga, Baharia, and Dakhla—are very remote, though the present war has brought them nearer civilisation, and an account of them appears in later chapters of this book. But the Fayyum is unique. It is an oasis within the accepted meaning of the word, and yet unlike all the others. It is connected with the Nile by a canal or river, the *Bahr Yussuf* ("Joseph's River"), which leaves the Ibrahimiyeh Canal near Deirut, some 140 miles south of the city of Fayyum, and after winding along the Nile Valley, more or less parallel to the main stream, turns north-west near the town of Beni-Suef, and runs across the Fayyum oasis to its north-western corner, where the residue of water that remains after irrigating the oasis flows into the large lake of Karoun, and there disappears by evaporation.

The following old Arab legend, quoted from Sir Hanbury Brown's book on the Fayyum, connects the Bahr Yussuf with the Bible story:

> "Joseph, to whom may Allah show mercy and grant peace, when he was Prime Minister of Egypt and in high favour with Rayan his Sovereign, after that he was more than a hundred years old, became an object of envy to the favourites of the King and the puissant seigneurs of the Court of Memphis, on account of the great power he wielded and the affection entertained for him by the King. They accordingly thus addressed the monarch: 'Great King, Joseph is now very old, his knowledge has diminished, his beauty has faded, his judgment is unsound, his sagacity has failed.'
>
> "The King said: 'Set him a task which shall serve as a test.' At this time El Fayoum was called El Hun, or 'The Marsh.' It served for a waste-basin for the waters of

Upper Egypt, which flowed in and out unrestrained. The courtiers, having taken counsel together what to propose to the King, gave this reply to Pharaoh: 'Lay the royal commands upon Joseph that he shall divert the waters of El Hun from the Nile and drain it, so as to give you a new province and an additional source of revenue.' The King assented, and, calling Joseph to his presence, said: 'You know how dearly I love my daughter, and you see that the time has arrived in which I ought to carve out an estate for her out of the crown lands, and give her a separate establishment of which she should be the mistress. I have, however, no territory available for the purpose except the submerged land of El Hun. It is in many respects favourably situated. It is a convenient distance from my capital. It is surrounded by desert. My daughter will thus be independent and protected.'

"'Quite true, great King,' responded Joseph. 'When would you wish it done, for accomplished it shall be by the aid of Allah, the all-powerful.' 'The sooner the better,' said the King. Then Allah was kind and furnished Joseph with a plan. He directed him to make three canals: one from Upper Egypt, a canal on the east, a canal on the west. Joseph collected workmen and dug the Canal of Menhi Ashmunin to El Lahoun. Then he excavated the canal of El Fayoum and the eastern canal, with another canal called Ben Hamid to the west.

"In this way the water was drained from El Hun. Then he set an army of labourers at work. They cut away the tamarisks and bushes which grew there, and carried them away. At the season when the Nile begins to rise the marsh had been converted into good cultivated land. The Nile rose; the water entered the mouth of the Menhi Canal, and flowed down the Nile Valley to El Lahoun, whence it turned towards El Fayoum, and entered the canal in such volume that it filled it and converted the land into a region irrigated by the Nile. King Rayan thereupon came to see his new province with the courtiers who had advised him to set Joseph the task. When they saw the result they greatly marvelled at the skill and inventive genius of Joseph, and

exclaimed: 'We do not know which most to admire, the draining of the marsh and the destruction of the noxious plants, or the conversion of its surface into fresh and well-watered fields.'

"Then the King said to Joseph: 'How long did it take you to bring this district into the excellent state that I find it in?' 'Seventy days,' responded Joseph. Then Pharaoh turned to his courtiers and said: 'Apparently one could not have done it in a thousand days.' Thus the name was changed from El Hun or 'The Marsh,' to El Fayoum, 'The Land of a Thousand Days.'"

At the great Barrage of Assiut (not to be confused with the even larger dam hundreds of miles farther south at Assouan) the necessary water for supplying the valley below that point to Beni Suef and thence into the Fayyum is diverted from the Nile by locks and regulators. In the Fayyum itself scientific irrigation may be seen carried to its maximum development.

The Bahr Yussuf cuts through the otherwise continuous cliffs of the Libyan Desert that form the western wall of the Nile Valley, and, by thus connecting the Fayyum Oasis with that valley, makes it a peninsula of green rather than the island that every well-conducted oasis should be. When I left Cairo for my new post, long study of a map in Baedeker had not enabled me to form any mental picture of the Fayyum landscape, for it was clear that it did not square with my childhood's notion of the oasis of fiction.

In the fifty-seven miles from Cairo to Wasta, where the branch line for Fayyum diverges from the main line to Luxor, one passes in a long succession nearly all the famous pyramids of Egypt, and some description of them here is necessary to explain the historical position of the two pyramids in the Fayyum Oasis itself. This wonderful line of colossal monuments extends from Gizeh near Cairo to Illahun or El Lahoun near Beni Suef, and all of them lie on the west side of the Nile Valley. The abode of the dead was supposed to be the West, the land of darkness where the sun ended his course.

A sweeping assertion is made by some critics that civilisation moved "against the stream of the Nile"—*i.e.*, upstream

and southwards, from the Delta and Memphis and Heliopolis towards Thebes (near Luxor) and Nubia. But such a statement requires so many qualifications that it is best ignored.

The experts do not agree within a thousand years as to the dates of the early dynasties of the Egyptian Kings; but there seems to be little doubt that the first Sovereign who adopted the pyramid form for his tomb was Zoser or Tcheser (such are the vagaries of learned men's spelling!), the builder of the Step Pyramid at Sakkara, opposite the railway-station of Bedrashein, twenty miles from Cairo. This King belonged to the Third Dynasty, which flourished either 3900 or 2900 years B.C., according to different Egyptologists. The seat of government was then at Memphis, the extensive ruins of which lie between Bedrashein and Sakkara. The Step Pyramid has long puzzled students, and is considered to be the half-developed form of the later type with smooth tapering sides.

Next came the Pyramid of Meidun, very well seen as one approaches Wasta Station, and again from the branch line going towards Fayyum. This was the work of Snofru or Seneferu, a King of the Fourth Dynasty. It appears to be unfinished and is not a real pyramid, for which reason it is called by the natives El Haram-el-kaddab ("The False Pyramid"). The same King built the great pyramid at Dahshur, between Meidun and Sakkara.

He was followed by three rulers whose trio of tombs are covered by the familiar Pyramids of Gizeh—Kheops, Khephren, and Mencheres or Mykerinos.

The Kings of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties built pyramids at Sakkara and at Abusir (between Sakkara and Gizeh). There comes a long gap until the beginning of the "Middle Empire," when the pyramids at Lisht between Dahshur and Meidun were created, as well as another at Dahshur itself. Every one of this long series can be seen by the traveller between Cairo and Wasta, and when he has changed on to the Fayyum line he will soon observe the two last of all—the Pyramid of Sesostris II. at Illahun or El Lahoun, and that of Amenemhet III. at Hawara.

These two examples are well known by sight to all who were stationed at El Azzab in 1916, for both were easily seen from the camp, and the Hawara Pyramid is not more than four miles

away. So far as any conjecture is possible, they may be said to be 4000 years old (Twelfth Dynasty). Visitors to the Egyptian Museum at Cairo will remember the wonderfully beautiful and delicate jewellery that has been found in these tombs, especially at Hawara. But a visit to the great crumbling structures themselves is disappointing. Not a shred of architecture, as we understand it, is to be seen. Adjoining the Hawara Pyramid is a chaotic heap of small stones, which is said to be the site of the famous Labyrinth described by Strabo and other early travellers, a precursor of the "quaint conceits" beloved of the Elizabethans and their contemporaries in Italy, and indulged in by architects as well as by literary men.

To reach the camp at —— one took a light-railway train from the main station of Medinet-el-Fayyum, commonly called Fayyum for short, the capital of the Fayyum Province and Oasis. Only one brigade of my division was quartered here, but there was also a mounted brigade almost adjoining. Both infantry and yeomanry maintained a number of outposts, extending almost all round the oasis and as far as the desert west of Lake Karoun. Generally speaking, the yeomanry occupied the more remote places, the infantry posts being fairly accessible by means of the net of light railways that covers the whole oasis.

Brigade Headquarters lived in the house of the chief man of ——, a little hamlet by the station, and the other houses adjoining were all utilised for military purposes. When a plague scare occurred in the town, I assisted in the carrying out of "anti-rat" measures in the lower parts of these houses by blocking up all holes with a tasty mixture of cement, broken glass, and disinfectants, surely enough to deter the most persevering of rodents!

On one side of these buildings was a jumble of native huts and tombs, all walled in except for one gateway. This jumble formed a Coptic convent from which the hamlet took its name (Egypt. *Deir* signifies "convent"). It contained one or two chapels and one tomb, erected by a Belgian quite recently. This "convent" was always something of a problem, for the inhabitants were able to excuse their naturally dirty habits by an appeal to the sacredness of the place, and it was considered inadvisable to interfere with them. The convent was put out

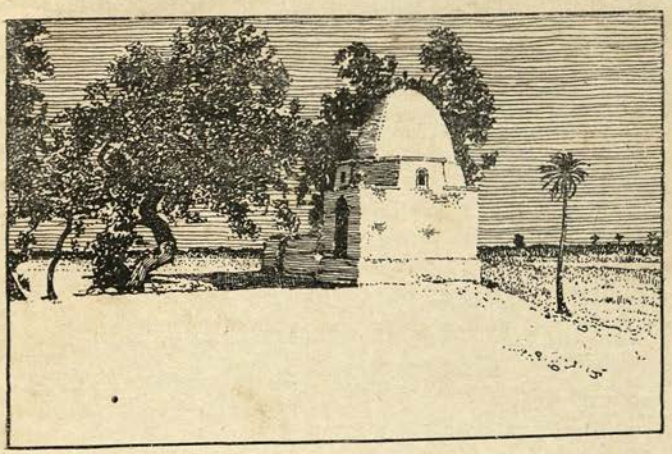
of bounds, as was indeed necessary, for the souvenir habit is not confined to His Royal Highness of Prussia, and any old pelvis or tibia would serve as a gift from Tommy to his best girl. When Dame Fortune again placed the sanitary welfare of this place in my hands, a year later, I had no difficulty in persuading the civil authorities to "put the lid on" one or two corpses that had become a trifle obstreperous, and also to carry out some other minor improvements on this hallowed but unhealthy ground.

The hamlet, like so many other villages in this irrigated country, stands a foot or two above the level of the surrounding land, and is enclosed in a bend of the Bahr Yussuf, a stream I shall remember for several unusual features. In the first place, it provided the means of my introduction to one Bill Harris. He was the bugbear of the troops in Fayyum, for by his presence in the water of every stream connected with the Nile he made bathing impossible at a time when conditions of life made it more than ever desirable. The heat in that memorable month far surpassed anything I have known in Egypt, and even natives admitted that it was exceptional. Yet though a swift-flowing stream swept round our camp, our allowance of water was reduced to a minimum, and bathing was absolutely prohibited. Every drop of drinking-water, and even of washing-water, had to be specially treated, apart from the usual chlorination process that it undergoes in ordinary circumstances. And all this pother was caused by the little bilharzia worm (whose name the soldiers so aptly paraphrased) that is found in certain snail-shells clinging to rushes and other vegetation by the water's edge. But though cases are not very frequent, and many Anglo-Egyptians bathe in the Nile with impunity, the risk of this worm becoming a human parasite is a very real one, and the results are serious.

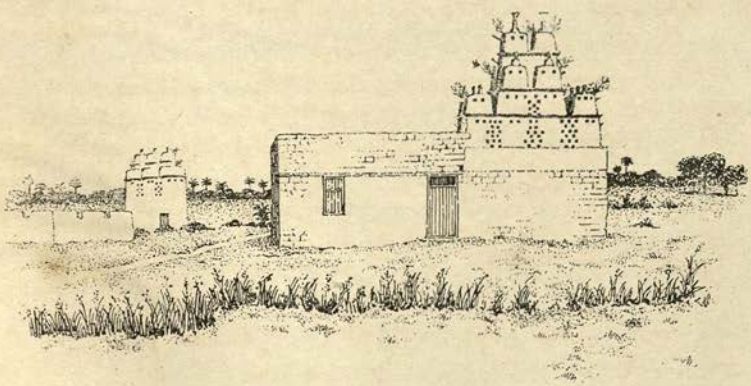
Another feature of the Bahr Yussuf was an enormous water-wheel, or rather a row of four huge water-wheels, close to Brigade Headquarters. One sees many devices in connection with irrigation all over the oasis, but this particular contrivance is by far the largest of its kind that I have ever seen. In my tent, nearly a mile away, the curious creaking groans that it made sounded like the wail of a tormented spirit. I have since heard a fanciful *padre* liken them to the church-bells of his native village! To me it seemed a weird Egyptian sound, one of the nocturnal



THE BAHR YUSSUF CANAL, DEIR EL-AZZAB.



A SHEIKH'S TOMB NEAR LAHOUN.



PIGEON-COTES AT DEIR EL-AZZAB, FAYYUM.

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noises that will sometimes ring in my head after the war is done, like the croaking of armies of bull-frogs at Ismailia and Assiut, the yelps and howls of jackals at Sollum, the crunching of thousands of horses' feet in the Wadi at Shellal, and the dull roar of the guns outside Gaza.

Close to the giant water-wheels was an equally remarkable pigeon-cote, the largest known to me—with one exception, near Baliana Station in Upper Egypt. These curious erections are familiar sights in most parts of Egypt, though usually on a much larger scale. The village pigeon-cote is a communal affair, almost resembling a small fortress in appearance, as a recent writer has suggested, and the pigeons are greatly prized. It is said that friction has often arisen between the British Army and natives in regard to shooting of the birds by the former. But that must have been in the good old days! The E.E.F. is not supposed to run about Egypt taking casual pot-shots at local live stock. I have never been able to ascertain the object for which these pigeons are kept in such large numbers. At Shousha Camp, farther up the Nile, they may be seen in great flocks. It is said that their guano is valuable, but that theory is not very convincing. Nor could carrier-pigeons be required in any quantity.

Some distance from our camp at El Azzab, and separated from it by another canal, flowing as fast as the Adige at Verona, was the village of El Azzab, quite distinct from the convent-hamlet of Deir-el-Azzab. The former was typical of Egyptian villages in its ruinous condition, most of the houses being mud hovels with a flat roof of straw in which hens, rats, and smaller fry wandered at will. When I was learning something of "the minor horrors of war" at Chelsea, I found it difficult to understand why a plague-infected rat should drop from the roof of a house on to the floor when it died. But when I had seen a few of these Egyptian dwellings, especially one in the town of Fayyum, where a case of plague had recently occurred, I understood. There is no plastered or boarded ceiling to the rooms below, only a heap of dirty straw supported on a few tree trunks laid from wall to wall. When a house of this kind becomes infected, the first step is to burn all the straw of the roof.

The writer whom I have just quoted on the subject of pigeon-

cotes attributes the ruinous condition of the smaller houses partly to the necessity existing under the former Turkish rule of appearing as poor as possible, but chiefly to a prevalent Moslem superstition that a family should never continue to inhabit a house if its head has died there. In the remote oasis of Siwa this has led to some unexpected architectural feats, described in Chapter VIII.

While in Fayyum it fell to my lot one day to visit the Omdeh of El Azzab on a more or less ceremonial mission, which had as its object the purchase of manure from our horse-lines. I went with an A.S.C. officer who was also implicated, and his interpreter. It was an amusing function, the forerunner of others still more amusing at Siwa long afterwards. He met us with some dignity, and conducted us to a pleasant little verandah upstairs, where compliments were exchanged, with long intervals of silence between them. The Omdeh is the head-man of a place, not exactly mayor or magistrate or squire, but a combination of all three. He must own at least 10 acres of land, and he has the privilege of being exempted from part of his taxes. His sons are also exempted from military service, but His Worship of El Azzab had one son who was a local policeman. In the Cairo Museum is a very ancient and wonderful statue from Sakkara, dating back to very early times in the Ancient Empire, known as the *Sheikh-el-Beled* ("the Sheikh of the Village"). This nick-name was given to it by the Arabs, who saw in its well-fed features and expression of smug respectability the typical official of their own day.

In the large towns, such as Medinet-el-Fayyum, there is a *Mudir*, an important personage of much higher rank than the village Omdeh of El Azzab. When we had sat with that worthy for some time, he followed up his initial offering of cigarettes with sherbet, after which coffee was served in the usual tiny cups. The verandah was shaded by the green branches of a fine acacia-tree. Business and ceremony being finished, he then conducted us to his beautiful garden, where, after walking through a vine-clad pergola where tiny grapes were already to be seen, he finally presented us each with a rose, and accompanied us to the boundary of his village, through the palm-groves, escorted by two native soldiers and a policeman. In nearly all

cases the Omdeh or Sheikh of these filthy villages possesses a large garden enclosed by mud walls, and entered by a gate furnished with the primitive native sliding latch made of wood with a few nails.

The outstanding feature of life in El Azzab Camp during this month was the weather. In the journal that I sent home at the time I find that it occupied a large part of my space. On my arrival I fixed up a thermometer on my tent-pole, and thereafter obtained a good deal of amusement by watching its record. That day it recorded 100°, a temperature that one found oppressive after living in the cool lofty rooms, shaded by a deep stone verandah, of the Abbassia Mess. I discarded the riding-breeches and leggings and tunic that everybody wore in Cairo, and purchased a pair of "shorts" from the local Hindu. Books left lying about in my tent began to curl up, and my writing-pad assumed an inconvenient concave form.

The following entries from my journal speak for themselves:

> *April* 26.—". . . Although it is now 5 p.m., the thermometer is over 105° in the shade, and for several hours previously it stood at 110°. A wind like the blast from an open oven-door is sweeping over the desert, and every now and then it brings with it a cloud of white dust. The scanty uniform that I was wearing is reduced even more now. Yesterday, when in the town near here, I purchased a leather belt and a pair of sand-shoes, and I have discarded socks, boots, putties, collar and tie, so that I have just about reached the limit."
>
> * * * * *
>
> "These asterisks denote a break of three hours, during which there has been a most awful sandstorm here. Two days ago, I am told, the Arabs celebrated the beginning of the *khamseen*, or 'fifty days,' a wind which sweeps like a scourge over the desert. To-day, after all these high temperatures, it has arrived with a vengeance. It came tearing along about 5.45 p.m., and you see the clouds, like smoke, rolling up very fast. It catches you very suddenly, and almost chokes you if you are outside. I was in my tent writing, and luckily my man had just let the sides down for the

night, but it swept through everything, and I hung on to the flaps by the doorway, trying to keep it out there. One minute the wind blows due east, next due west, but it is worst, I am told, from the south-west, straight from the centre of the Sahara. I have not seen any tents in our camp blown down, but the Y.M.C.A. marquee, the brigade canteen, and some shops made of matting are all flat. I can't think how the tents stand it. It is on again now as I write, at 9 p.m. . . . The dust borne by this *khamseen* gets into everything—a thick layer on your flea-bag, your toothbrush, your soap, and your towel. A thinner layer has actually penetrated my 'box, soldier's, wooden,' which has a specially close-fitting lid that I thought would keep out anything. . . . The best time of day here is before breakfast. I get up at 6.30, but really ought to be up earlier still. By 9 a.m. the thermometer is up to 100°, and even walking about becomes hard work. The men have no duties between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. They just lie on the tent floors and drip and gasp. Matting huts are being provided wherever possible. The men's dinner is at 5 or 5.30 p.m., as you simply can't eat much at midday. . . ."

May 9.—". . . It is not extraordinarily hot as this country goes, about 99° in the shade. However, I have just made the round of my tent-pegs and cords, so I may as well attempt a bit of writing in the intervals, just rushing to hold the flaps of the tent together when the gust comes. It looks very strange after it has passed, a dirty-white column like smoke, quite opaque, and moving at a tremendous pace. . . ."

May 16.—". . . You hear many nice things said about the Egyptian climate, but they refer almost exclusively to the winter and to circumstances in certain luxurious hotels on the Nile. Now I will give you an exact description of conditions here, neither exaggerated nor underdrawn. Yesterday it was 122° in the shade; the day before 119°. To-day seems quite as hot as yesterday. The thermometer now passes 100° at 7 a.m., and remains at the maximum from about 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. . . . Most of us lie nearly or quite naked in our tents for the greater part of the day.

Lately, men have been steadily filing into hospital with minor forms of sunstroke, etc. An officer can keep fairly cool by continually sitting in his bath and by sponging his head from time to time. During the last few days I have lost all energy, can only read and smoke for a few hours; the rest of the time I just lie and muse. About 6 p.m. I manage a walk with the Colonel of the field ambulance, along the bank of a canal fairly near here, or do an inspection of the camp. Of course, all the busybodies say in the books that for so many hours each day you should lie down and "keep cool." Your bed is 122°, and your chair is 122°, and the floor is more! To-day there is a wind blowing about 150°, and it is laden with fine dust. If one is lucky enough to have secured some oranges, they too will be 122°. One's bath-water is tepid and thick with dust. If the Senussi are going to attack us here, as rumour says, I hope they will have the decency to select some hour about midnight.

"By 6 p.m. you feel washed out and can't sleep at all at nights. You wake up at 4.30 a.m. or earlier to the endless noises of bugles, and so on. Then—according to the books—however slack you feel, you should take advantage of the 'cool fresh morning air.' . . . And then there is this terrible problem of drink. My daily average here is about eight good cups of tea, two or more glasses of lemonade, and a few glasses of water out of my bucket, also two or more oranges. Lately I've drunk more lemonade than this, owing to the heat-wave. Of course, all the comfortable people who mind the business of others would tell you that this is too much, and would give you a nicely graduated scale of moisture containing the correct proportions of tannin, alcohol, and all the rest of it. But who's going to listen to rules in this place? You simply must drink. Between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. you can't eat anything, but you're continually thirsty. And as I'm surrounded by medical men who all drink as much or more of the same stuff as I do, why worry? To-day for lunch we had soup, which was very welcome, and then bully-beef and a teaspoonful of sardines. Nobody touched the 'bully'; we just drank tea and coolish liquids alternately. . . ."

May 18.—". . . Yesterday it was again 124° in the shade here and 148° in the sun. Even in Cairo it was 114° in the shade. I feel as weak as a kitten and rather light-headed. I went on foot over to the adjoining camp, about a mile away, in the afternoon, and as I was returning for dinner, about 6.50 p.m., the long-expected *khamseen* caught me up, travelling at a terrific pace. I could not see a yard ahead. The storm raged furiously for about four hours without a moment's lull, and I slept the sleep of the fed-up in a tightly tethered tent all closed in. It was no use cleaning one's teeth and bathing one's eyes, for the water was full of dust. About 10 p.m. I went off alone by moonlight, and jumped into the canvas tank used for bathing by the 200 men of the ambulance. It reeked of disinfectants, but was refreshing.

"The night was cooler, and this morning, at dawn, quite pleasant, but at 7.30 a.m. the storm began again and has raged ever since. . . . Everybody's tempers are vile, no avoidable work is being done, and we are all feeling suffocated. What must the inside of our lungs be like, for we are breathing the stuff day and night? . . . Never again will I be taken in by the lines of the hymn, 'Where Afric's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand.' I don't believe that the author can ever have visited this benighted spot in May. To call this filthy whirlwind a 'fountain' is really too much, and this white, suffocating, gritty dust is very far from being 'golden sand.' Oh, well, 'Cheero,' as we say hereabouts. . . ."

May 19.—". . . It is considerably cooler to-day, down to the nineties again, and actually dropped to 70° during the night."

Re-reading these lugubrious extracts, I feel rather ashamed of having sent home such realistic accounts of the weather. But after this one wretched month there has been nothing comparable with it in nearly two years' experience, and, as a result, hardly any grumbles about the Egyptian climate followed this one outburst! In Palestine, however, a year later, though the actual thermometer-readings were not so high, conditions of life were more uncomfortable in some ways, for we had dug-outs in lieu of tents, and nothing at all in lieu of oranges and lemonade.

Apart from the *khamseen*, El Azzab was not such a bad place. Instead of a limitless expanse of bare burning sand stretching to the horizon, as was the case in other "oases" where troops were camped at this time, we were surrounded by country that was both interesting and picturesque. From my tent in the camp of the infantry brigade I looked across a desert foreground to a strip of green all along the horizon. Rising from it were the feathery heads of a clump of palms, and beyond them the Pyramid of Hawara. Farther to the right one could just see the distant Pyramid of Lahoun, and, still more to the right, the rugged outline and golden tints of a range of rocky hills. On the left, beyond Deir-el-Azzab and its creaking water-wheels, was the minaret of a mosque in Medinet-el-Fayyum. Behind me lay El Azzab in its palms, and thence the level green oasis extended to the horizon, where the blue cliffs of the Libyan Desert above Lake Karoun were just visible.

The camp was situated in a bend formed by the junction of two canals connected with the Bahr Yussuf. The banks of these canals formed a pleasant promenade in the cool of the evening. They were lined with bamboos, willows, and other vegetation unknown to me. Kingfishers and other birds darted across the water. There was also a new variety of dragon-fly—which we christened the "aeroplane-fly" because of the black spots on its transparent wings—and many butterflies.

The irrigated land extended right up to one of these canals, so that we were able to study all the quaint sights of Egyptian country life, in which the Fayyum abounds. Many of them—the *sakkiyeh*, or water-wheel, turned by a blindfolded ox, and the *shadoof*, or apparatus for raising water to a higher level by means of a bucket hung from a weighed and pivoted bar—were familiar to me already in walks round Mustapha or through the green fields that adjoin Abbassia and Sharabia, near Cairo. But the *gamoose*, or buffalo, that one met everywhere in Fayyum was a novelty. These odd-looking beasts were to be seen swimming happily in every canal, visibly enjoying the cool water and disappearing under the surface from time to time. We envied them their disregard of "Bill Harris." Often naked boys would ride them down into the canals. Children of both sexes, only a few years old, were always mounted on them. They fearlessly put

one small foot on the big animal's bent head, and thus scrambled on to its hump, a perilous but satisfactory seat.

One day I was surprised to see some of our artillery harnessed behind camels. An experiment was apparently being made to test their usefulness in this capacity, down a steep descent to a bridge over a stream, and though there were no casualties while I was watching, I have never seen the experiment repeated.

The level fields are planted with crops of sugar-cane, *dhurra*, cotton, and *berseem* at different seasons. The two former plants grow to a great height, whereas the cotton resembles a raspberry-plant until its large yellow flowers and fluffy white seeds make their appearance in due course. *Berseem* is the green fodder that the Cairo cabby carries in a bundle beneath his feet as he drives about the streets. Opposite the Continental Hotel the kerb of the long cab-rank is always littered with this verdant food. Another feature of rural landscapes all over Fayyum, as elsewhere in Egypt, is the white Sheikh's tomb that one finds outside every village and by the roadside. Usually these pretty little buildings are of cubical form, with a small dome, built of mud bricks plastered and whitewashed.

The camp itself was composed of bell-tents arranged on conventional lines, like the diagrams in the "Field Service Pocket Book"; very different from the untidy mess of bivouacs that aeroplanes and limited transport made necessary when we marched into Palestine the following spring. There were a few marquees for officers' messes, and huts made of light timber framing, covered with matting, for the men. Otherwise arrangements were fairly primitive.

The camp just across one of the canals was more permanent in character, with long covered horse-lines for the mounted brigade. They remained till the end of the year, and were thus able to make themselves very comfortable, even attaining to a covered swimming-bath and a small theatre!

The following extract from my diary shows a typical instance of the way that rumours fly round a camp:

> *Thursday Night, May* 4.—"It is rumoured to-night that England has been invaded, that 10,000 Germans have landed

on the East Coast. It may not be true, but the rumour about Kut-el-Amara was true, and bad news has an unfortunate knack of being true just now. . . ."

The normal routine of inspecting the two camps, and of chlorinating all the water for the troops, was varied by occasional trips to the various outposts held by units of my brigade from El Azzab.

The nearest of these was in the town of Medinet-el-Fayyum, about four miles away. Here we had less than a company, as far as my recollection goes. Their tents were pitched on a level irrigated field close to the Mudiria, or Town Hall. And here, for the first time, I made my acquaintance with the mosquito-problem, which just a year afterwards, in Palestine, occupied nearly all my time for a month. Never had I seen such an array of bites as the officer in charge of this small party showed me on his arms, and, unfortunately, in a district like Fayyum, where thousands of acres are under water, little can be done to mitigate the pest. One can only take refuge behind mosquito-curtains of a very fine mesh.

Medinet-el-Fayyum is one of the largest towns in Egypt south of Cairo, and, though not very interesting to an antiquarian, has a few unusual features. The European population, exclusive of "Dagoes," numbers less than a dozen. There is a small modern hospital—which had been taken over by the military authorities when I visited it—near the station. In the middle of the town is a somewhat gaudy mosque, erected quite recently, with a prominent minaret. Farther west, along the Bahr Yussuf, is the old mosque of Kaït Bey. The façade towards the canal is unprepossessing, but on the far side is an old porch with elaborate bronze-mounted doors. The interior contains a fine *mihrab*, or niche, and pulpit, also a series of ancient carved stone capitals.

But the feature of the town is the Bahr Yussuf, which winds through it between canalised banks planted with trees. Several small bridges cross it, but none of them can be called picturesque. Some European houses are situated on one embankment, and, as they are mostly bowered in flowering trees and shrubs, there is an effect of brightness and an air of civilisation surrounding

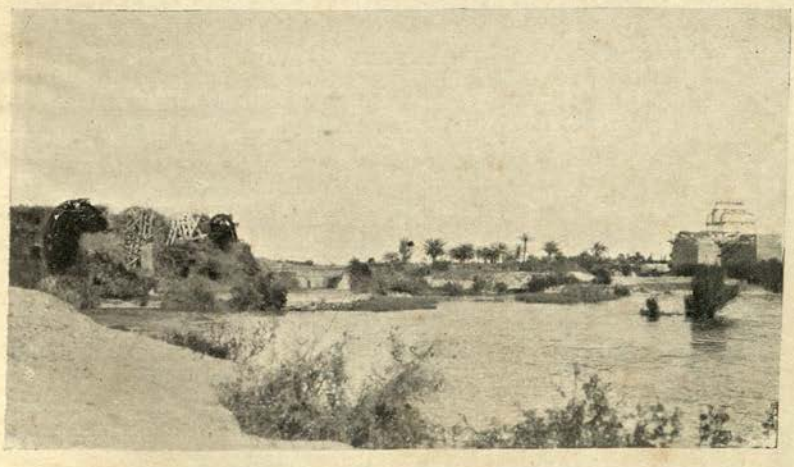
them. One of them is the residence of a missionary, and from his balcony I watched the natives bathing. The Bahr Yussuf serves the triple purpose of common sewer, swimming-bath, and water-supply. This should be a distinct saving to the rate-payer. Even the women bathe on the muddy banks at times, though there are no printed regulations as to "Ladies' Day." I was taken to tea at the missionary's house by a *padre*. This was the first time that I had spoken to a woman or entered a private house for three months, and the next opportunity did not occur till more than a year afterwards. The bazaars at Fayyum are disappointing, for they have none of the Oriental flavour one finds in Cairo, and they are filled with cheap and nasty European goods, largely from Germany.

North of the town is a large area covered by the ruins of the Ancient Egyptian city of Shetet, known to the Greeks in later days as Crocodilopolis-Arsinoë. At one time its population is said to have exceeded 100,000. Very little now remains to indicate its former greatness. From a conical heap of potsherds and other rubbish, over 60 feet high and known as Kom Faris, one looks down on a jumble of walls and trenches rather like a mud honeycomb, but no definite plan can be traced there. However, even so slight an eminence as this affords a splendid view of the whole oasis, surrounded on all sides by rocky or sandy hills, except at the point where the Bahr Yussuf cuts through them in its course from the Nile Valley. Just as one associates Heliopolis with sun-worship and Memphis with the worship of bulls, so this district was the centre of the crocodile cult. The Fayyum has furnished a very large number of the exhibits in the Egyptian Museum at Cairo, as well as many in the smaller museums at Alexandria.

Small infantry posts were established at Kom Abu-Radi on the railway between Fayyum and Wasta, and at Kom-Sheisheh, south of Wasta, on the main line to Luxor. Each was guarding a girder-bridge over a canal, and consisted of a handful of men under an officer. I inspected the primitive sanitation of these little camps with a medical Colonel, and, as there was no train back to Fayyum and El Azzab until the evening, we decided to make a detour by Beni Suef, and thus arrive some hours earlier. After a passable lunch at a Greek restaurant in Beni Suef, we



DOORWAY OF MOSQUE OF KAÏT BEY, MEDINET-EL-FAYYUM.



WATER-WHEELS ON THE BAHR YUSSUF, AT EL AZZAB, FAYYUM.

To face page 60.

strolled down to the Nile to see the sights. Here my journal refreshes my memory:

> ". . . As we returned we picked up a Coptic boy, who remarked genially: 'Jesus helps the English soldier. Do you know Jesus?' The Colonel said he did, with the result that we were then inveigled into visiting the local Coptic church. To our great surprise, this involved a ceremonial call on the rather dirty old priest, who received us in a sitting-room with electric light! We sat on a Chesterfield covered with good modern chintz! The priest sent out a boy of nine or ten, with a face like a rat (alleged to be a 'deacon'!) for some cigarettes, and coffee was brought in. Then followed a number of long pauses. The Colonel was quite paralysed, so I attempted a few complimentary remarks with the Coptic boy as interpreter. There was also an Italian boy who had joined us. He was eleven, he said, and was greatly pleased to talk Italian to anybody who knew even so little of it as I do. Eventually we escaped into the church, which was rather ugly and gaudy, quite modern. The women are kept in a gallery behind arches upstairs, the men sit on forms down below. There was a good deal of pitch-pine and bad glass about, and some shocking 'religious' pictures. . . ."

Another outpost was at Kafr Mahfuz, in the northern part of the oasis, where the camel trade from Bedrashein enters. Owing to a head wind that made cycling to Fayyum Station hard work, I missed my train there, so had to make use of another means of transport:

> ". . . It was a trolley, pushed by two extraordinarily strong niggers, who took turns. They had a fearful wind against them the whole of the outward journey, but they did the fourteen miles odd in less than two hours. It had been arranged that this trolley should be attached to one of the toy trains that traverse these light railways once or twice a day, but, as I had missed the 8.40, they had to push me the whole way. They 'changed hands' (or rather feet) every 60 yards or so, as it was very hard work, and they

never stopped except once, when I made them do so. It sounds incredible, but they ran along *the rail itself*, a very narrow one, only about 1½ inches wide at the most. Coming back they moved quicker still, about ten miles an hour. But when we were halfway back, we hitched the trolley on to the tail of the one and only goods-cum-passenger train at a village junction. . . ."

A few days later I visited another Infantry outpost at Abu Gandir, some seventeen miles by devious railways to the west of El Azzab, and commanding a possible approach from the desert through a gap in the hills. The only incident that I can remember on that day was the sight of a group of ibis, the sacred birds of Egyptian mythology. But I was always impressed by the loneliness of some of these remote little camps, where often some school-boy subaltern was in sole charge, designing his defences, administering punishments, and even, in one case I noticed, attempting a Prayer-Book service on Sunday.

The most distant outposts, on the western fringe of the oasis, were held by the mounted brigade. One such was at Kasr Karoun, a very ancient site at the end of Lake Karoun, already mentioned in this chapter. All round the lake are Ptolemaic and Roman remains, for this was the famous Lake Moeris of the Greek historians. Its present length is twenty-five miles and its greatest breadth six miles. But old writers vary very much in their accounts of it. Thus, Pliny gives its circumference as 250 miles, and Mucianus as 450 miles. Strabo says that it is artificially regulated, and Herodotus regards it as wholly artificial. Modern experts consider that there never was a very large lake here at all, and that some of the casual geographers of bygone days must have confused the ordinary inundations of the Nile at certain seasons with the existence of Lake Moeris. The surface of the present Lake Karoun is 130 feet below sea-level. Sportsmen from Cairo come to the little hotel on its banks for duck-shooting. Robert Hichens includes it in his picture of the oasis, in his lurid story "Bella Donna":

"The Fayyum is a great and superb oasis, situated upon a plateau [*sic*] of the desert, wonderfully fertile, rich and bland, with a splendid climate and springs of sweet waters

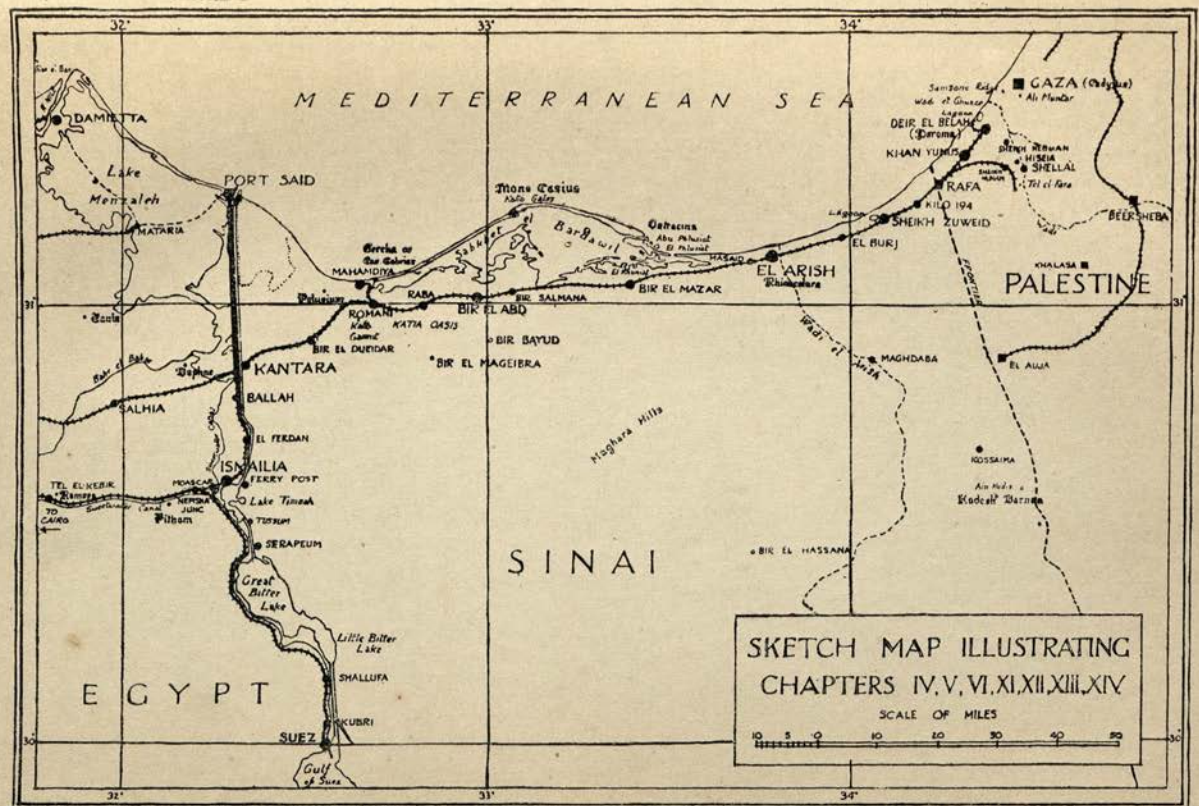
> which, carefully diverted into a network of channels, spreading like wrinkles over the surface of the land, carry life and a smiling of joy through the crowding of palms, the olive and fruit trees, the corn and the brakes of sugar-cane. The Egyptians often call it 'the country of the roses,' and they say that everything grows there. The fellah thinks of it as a Paradise where men can only be happy. Every Egyptian who has ever set the butt end of a gun against his shoulder sighs to be among its multitudinous game. The fisherman longs to let down his net into the depths of its sacred lake. The landowner would rather have a few acres between Sennoures and Beni Suef than many in the other parts of Egypt. The man who is amorous yearns after the legendary beauty of its unveiled women, with their delicately tattooed chins, their large eyes, and their slim and sinuous bodies. And scarcely is there upon the Nile a brown boy whose face will not gleam and grow expressive with desire at the sound of the words 'El Fayyum.'"

Bella Donna, however, was neither farmer nor sportsman, but a hunter of other game, and a Cockney. The landscape and natives round her camp near the Lake had no poetical charm for her. She would hardly have appreciated the tempestuous whirl of the *khamseen*, and would have had no interest in the ruined temples.

I have had no opportunity, in my many visits to the Fayyum, of seeing these buildings, for they are difficult of access. But several descriptions of them have been published. One group lies at Kasr Karoun, where there was a Cavalry outpost in 1916, and consists of a number of ruins spread over a large area about 2,200 by 1,000 feet, thought by some to be the ruins of the ancient Dionysias. The most interesting of these ruins is a small Ptolemaic temple with a forecourt. On the north of the lake, even more inaccessible, is a slightly smaller area covered by ruins. These bear the modern name of Dima, or Dimei, and may represent the site of the city of Bacchus or Saknopaiou Nesos.

On May 23, I received a wire ordering me to proceed to Ismailia immediately to join my chief. Subsequently I learned that I was one of a few officers who were going to the Canal as the

advance-party of the division. The move was unexpected, and as I scanned the Delta landscape from the railway-carriage window next morning, I looked forward to the new "sphere of operations" with considerable interest. Of Ismailia I knew little, but the Suez Canal was a constant topic of discussion at the time.



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CHAPTER IV

LIFE ON THE CANAL

THE title of this chapter has been carefully chosen, for although I lived for more than six months on the east side of the Suez Canal, I saw nothing of the considerable fighting during the summer at Romani and elsewhere. The only event to disturb the placid calm of Ismailia and Ferry Post through all those months was the appearance of two German aeroplanes before breakfast on August 3. I was strolling through the lines of a battalion near the Ferry when the crash of several bombs in the camp attracted our eyes upwards, and just as we spotted the two Taubes nearly overhead the "Archies" opened fire. More bombs followed, probably intended for G.H.Q. just opposite, and then there were a few reports on the west side of the town. But the casualties were almost nil, and with this solitary exception life on this part of the Canal was simply a matter of routine and fatigues, of polishing buttons and decorating camps, of sleeping and eating and bathing.

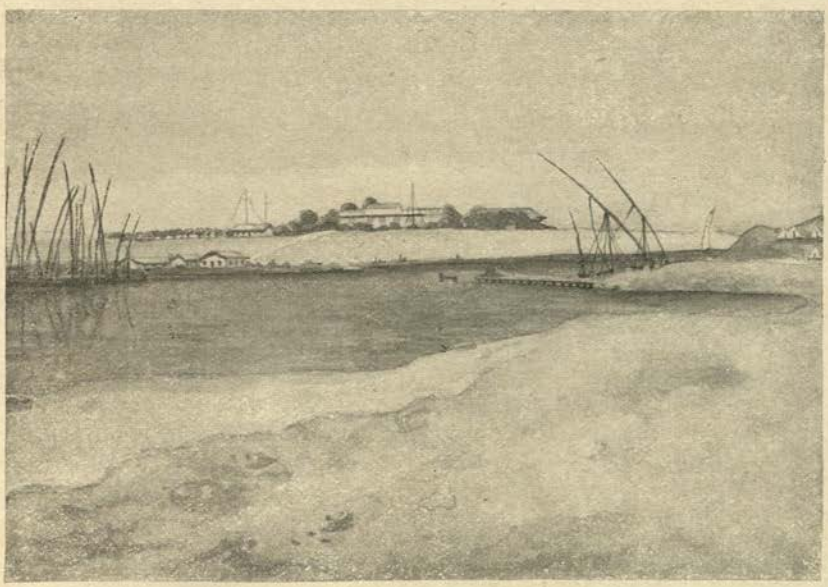
But the divisions who occupied the northern sector of the Canal defences had a very different experience. While we remained between the fortified outpost line (ten miles out in the desert) and the Canal itself, the Scotties and the Lancashire lads and the mounted troops—Anzacs and English—who eventually became known as "Desert Column," were fighting their way eastwards along the oldest road in the world, to El Arish. We were in comfortable tents and huts, bathing daily in the Canal. They were bivouacking in the sand-dunes, and were visited by hostile aircraft again and again. The new military railway crawled across the hundred miles of wilderness between Kantara and El Arish during the year, and it was not till January, 1917, that my own division moved up to the railhead and joined in the general advance into Palestine. But more than one brigade of this division took part in the fighting at various times, and eventually

the rest of us traversed the desolate country of which we had heard so much.

This, then, is no chronicle of warlike deeds, but a slight sketch of the life that tens of thousands of us led in the latter half of 1916, and of the place that we lived in. The Ismailia sector differed from the other portions of the line in having at its apex one of the most charming towns in Egypt, to which one could escape for a meal or for a walk in luxuriant gardens when the glare and monotony of the desert became more than usually trying. Of Ismailia itself I shall have something to say in the next chapter. When I arrived there one morning towards the end of May, my chief took me almost at once to the camp which we were shortly to occupy, across the Canal. We motored down a long avenue of green trees laden with large scarlet blossoms, and, after traversing some railway sidings, reached the Ferry, which gave its name to the large camp over the water—"Ferry Post." Then our car rattled over the sleepers of the pontoon bridge, and after a few rapid twists and turns we arrived at the headquarters of the division that we were about to relieve a few days later. I remember that my first thoughts on reaching this H.Q. camp was that it occupied an almost perfect position—perfect, that is, from a spectacular rather than a military point of view. A line of tents and marquees stood on the top of the sandy east bank of Lake Timsah. From each tent-door a little path bordered with white stones led to the water's edge, and, as we arrived, half the Staff seemed to be enjoying a bathe. At the far end of the row were tents and huts where the All Highest of the division lived, and in one hut we consumed the tail-end of his excellent lunch. Just below his marquee was a fine diving-board. Across the lake one could see the groves of palms and pines in which Ismailia lay, and farther away the bare sandhills of the desert on the western bank. Towards the south, where the Canal threaded its way through sand-dunes, rose the distant blue mountains near Suez. Ten weeks later, when the headquarters of the British brigade that relieved this division moved several miles out into the desert, I secured this ideal site for my own insignificant command, and thereafter enjoyed both the beautiful panorama and the diving-board, till, in the winter, came the move to Palestine.



LAKE TIMSAH, LOOKING WEST.



LAKE TIMSAH, SHOWING FERRY AND G.H.Q.

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The outgoing division was Australian, so during the next few days I was able to learn more of Colonial ways, and to correct, to some extent, the impressions I had formed in Cairo. When one lives with the Anzacs, one finds that they are splendid company. It is easy to see why the Australians are always so prominent in the illustrated Press and elsewhere. They are irrepressible, whereas the English Tommy is, only too often, silent. And this freedom of speech and manner is refreshing. Even a British Radical is left behind at an Australian mess, when conversation becomes lively, as it generally does. For more than a week I lived with an Anzac field ambulance at Ferry Post, and thoroughly enjoyed this bracing atmosphere. A R.A.M.C. mess is almost the last place in the world where one expects to hear anything startling or revolutionary, whereas the A.A.M.C. would compare favourably with a Socialist organisation in England, and is quite a tonic. In fact, I much preferred hearing original theories advanced at the festive board to listening to endless arguments on the respective merits of Sydney and Melbourne or to attacks on the quartermaster, who had the misfortune to practise law in New Zealand. The petty feuds of Guelphs and Ghibellines appear to be trivial compared with the titanic struggle for pre-eminence between Melbourne and Sydney!

Another aspect of the unconventionality of Australians and New Zealanders is their readiness to oblige anyone in difficulties. Ask an Anzac officer for some assistance or some small article of equipment. Invariably he will do his best to help you, regardless of red-tape, and especially regardless as to whether it is "his job" or not.

The "Australian" medical officer who commanded their divisional Sanitary Section was a plump and genial Maltese, bearing a name famous in Italian history of the *seicento* and tracing his ancestry back without a kink to the ninth century, surely a record in the Australian Army!

Meals in this mess at Ferry Post were certainly unusual, both as regards menu and time-table. The chief feature was tea, in floods. The first breakfast was served at 5.30 a.m., and usually comprised fried steak and chips, besides eggs, tea, and the "usual trimmings." At 9.30 a.m. came the next breakfast, consisting of coffee or tea and biscuits. Lunch appeared at midday, more

tea winding up a normal programme of comestibles. So far as my memory goes, it was followed at the usual intervals by tea and dinner, each including the inevitable beverage.

Apart from these somewhat tannic but very refreshing meals, the chief event of the day was the evening bathe. Usually we took this between tea and dinner, walking over the desert and through a gap in the high embankment (formed by the débris excavated from the Canal) to the bathing-place, about a mile from our tents. Most of the Australians appeared to be splendid divers and swimmers.

One of these A.A.M.C. officers told me of a certain Anzac private who was admitted to his hospital as a patient. He asked the medical Major who examined him to look after his loose cash while he was in the ward. The Major consented, and the private then handed over a matter of £70. On being discharged, he came to the Major for his money, duly received it, and coolly handed the Major £2 as a tip!

Réveillé in this camp was at 4 a.m., and was sounded with great vigour on the pipes, with kilts and accessories. A few minutes later all sorts of bands broke into various melody.

In about a week they marched away, a brigade at a time. I shall never forget the night before their departure. Vast bonfires blazed behind the lines of every battalion. When darkness came, the flames from the various fires lit up crowds of yelling figures who danced round them. The Anzacs sang far into the night, and soon after dawn moved off in a long line, tramping over the hill to the Ferry, their bands playing the plaintive and beautiful strains of "There's a long, long trail a-winding into the land of my dreams."

The chief attraction of life on the Canal was, of course, the Canal itself. To the *blasé* traveller who gazes on its prosaic surroundings from a chair on the deck of a luxurious liner, this may seem to be an exaggeration. But put this comfortable critic in the heart of the desert for a few weeks, with nothing but sand in sight to the horizon, nothing to temper the glare of the sun except an occasional *khamseen*, nothing to do but perspire and swear, and he will soon change his mind. Ferry Post was situated just at the point where the Canal debouches into Lake Timsah. The camp covered the approach to the Canal and to

Ismailia from the great tableland of Central Sinai. This was the route chosen by Djemal Pasha for his abortive expedition in February, 1915, which reached the Canal and the lake, but was defeated with considerable loss.

Ismailia is the halfway house of the Suez Canal and the railway junction for the lines to Port Said and Suez from Cairo. It is also the point where the Sweet-water Canal divides into two branches, one going northwards to Port Said, the other southwards to Suez. It was thus, in 1916, the key of the whole Canal defences, as well as the seat of G.H.Q. for the summer months, when the jaded brass-hats were probably glad enough to escape from Cairo. From Port Said to Ballah, a distance of thirty-three miles, the Canal runs perfectly straight across Lake Menzaleh, past the station of Kantara on the little isthmus where the caravans to Palestine crossed in ancient times, and then across the partially dried-up Ballah Lake to Ferdan, forty miles from Port Said. Ferdan is not an exciting place. It was, for part of the summer of 1916, included in the area occupied by my division, but when I paid a visit to it, I was glad that my duties kept me farther south, near Lake Timsah and Ismailia. East of the Canal the country resembled the corresponding area in the Ferry Post sector, except that there was more scrub in the desert. But near the station there was a good deal of water, where mosquitoes made merry.

Going south from Ferdan, one came to a tract of rocky hills and sand-dunes terminating in the bluff where the finely situated buildings of G.H.Q. stood in their trees overlooking Lake Timsah. Through this difficult country, for some seven miles, the engineers of the Canal had to drive a huge cutting, which at certain points appears to be 80 feet deep or more down to the level of the water. A few contractors' engines and trucks still remain on the eastern side, apparently abandoned and forgotten. On the west there is a small ruined church, dedicated to the Virgin of the desert, and the foundations of mud houses, all that is left to indicate the site of the deserted village of El Gisr. From the summit of the highest of these sand-dunes, where an outpost was maintained by my brigade from Ferry Post, there was a magnificent view in all directions. The banks are exceedingly steep and the sand of which they are formed very loose, as I found one day when I

led my horse down a diagonal path from top to bottom. The three outposts between Ferdan and Ferry Post in those days were lonely little stations, but far from undesirable. Brass-hats seldom troubled them, though the ride along the narrow canal-banks always appealed to me, and the bathing from their very doors was delightful.

Nearer Ferry Post was a lighthouse, and then one came to the point chiefly favoured by the Australians for bathing. After they left, many of us continued to bathe there rather than in the place mostly used by the British troops at the north end of Lake Timsah. Opinions differ as to the merits of the Canal as a bathing-place, some alleging that it was dirty. It always seemed to me much less so than the lake, but both were great additions to our comfort. Jelly-fish were abundant, and many species of real fish, among them one variety resembling in size and taste the finest Solway salmon. The current in the Canal is supposed to run from south to north, but, owing, perhaps, to the north wind that blew along the deep cutting from mid-morning to sunset, we always found that a strong current ran in the opposite direction, at any rate on the surface.

Apart from bathing, the Canal provided a never-ending source of interest in the procession of great ships that moved up and down, for the submarine campaign had not then reached its maximum intensity. By far the greater number flew the British flag, then came French boats, and, more rarely, ships from Italy, Japan, Holland, and Scandinavia. Transports bound for Mesopotamia and India and "British East" were occasionally seen. A flutter of frocks on the deck of a liner was always the signal for loud shouts from the naked crowds bathing below. Beer-bottles and oranges were thrown down to Tommies in the water, who scrambled and dived for them. One night I looked down on a big hospital ship illuminated in red and green, a rare and beautiful sight. After dark one saw the searchlights of the approaching vessels as they rounded the bend near the light-house at El Gisr, sweeping the Canal banks, and thus creating a remarkable effect. Coming across Lake Timsah from the south, searchlights showed up the tents and huts near the Ferry in brilliant black and white. Once or twice a battleship passed with bands playing, and more frequently drab-coloured monitors.

A large French warship lived in Lake Timsah, as well as smaller fry. Lastly there were numerous Arab *dhows* moving to and fro with military stores, timber, and stone, picturesque boats with great red sails and chanting boatmen. Ismailia possesses a yacht-club, to which many of our officers belonged, and these white-winged craft flitted about the lake every afternoon.

South and east of Lake Timsah lay a curious tract of country, a region of alternate marsh and sand-dunes extending to Tussun, the place where the Turks attempted to cross the Canal in 1915. Riding over there one day, I came upon a number of shell-cases that presumably marked the site of the battle. Once I rode out to a place marked on the map as "Hyæna Plateau," but whether that hilarious beast haunts these shores I do not know.

Ferry Post Camp extended inland rather less than a mile from the Ferry, on either side of a metalled road, close to which ran the Decauville light railway. Originally the camp had been laid out to accommodate a whole division, except one infantry brigade which occupied the Railhead Camp and the line of outposts beyond it. The road curved up from the Ferry to negotiate the steep ascent from the Canal, and then ran nearly level for some miles east across the desert. The most attractive part of the camp was, naturally, that which overlooked the Ferry and the lake. The remaining area was continually swept by clouds of dust, a mixture of sand with dust from the road and from the soft white limestone rock. My own little patch, for the first month or two that I was in Ferry Post, lay on a rise overlooking the road and railway, and commanding an extensive view of desert and hills beyond, to the mountains near Suez. We thus saw all passing traffic without collecting any of its attendant dust. On the other hand, the smell of burning rubbish—a heavy, unpleasant smell in hot weather—continually blew through my tent from the "backyards" of the adjoining infantry lines. Apart from dust, the chief drawbacks of life at this time were heat and flies. The former did not compete with the most torrid temperatures of Fayyum in May, and was less oppressive because we were better housed—I, for instance, had a marquee of which two-thirds was orderly-room, and the remainder, screened off by a low curtain, constituted my bed-sitting-room. But even at Ferry Post the thermometer had a bad habit of recording figures on the

wrong side of 100°, rising to 115° in the shade early in June, and 105° even in September. Once, and once only, it rained. That was in November, after six months unbroken drought. The effect of the summer heat in my own case was that I lost a stone and a half in weight, quite a creditable effort for one who started from a reasonable weight in the spring. This appears to be a common experience with newcomers to Egypt, who often regain flesh with lowered temperatures, as I did.

When we arrived, flies were a perfect plague. I have never seen anything like the number in Egypt or Palestine since. One day, when not overbusy, I calculated that 7,000 were enjoying the cool moisture of my canvas bath, and that twice as many were availing themselves of my hospitality in other parts of my marquee. Yet in the Australian mess where I spent my first week on the Canal, I never heard the question mentioned, nor any vulgar abuse of the all-pervading insect. If it had been an English mess, there would have been no other topic of discussion, and, if a wretched sanitary officer had been present, his life would certainly have been made a burden to him, for in our Army all the sins of his predecessors in office are visited on him, so far as flies are concerned. Somehow they disappeared within a month or two. Everybody claimed the credit for this—commanders and medical officers of units, the medical staff of the division, I and my men, whose job it was primarily. But, unofficially, I am inclined to think that the success was due to good work all round.

The population of Ferry Post Camp fluctuated considerably during the summer, but the character of the landscape remained unaltered—the usual hideous waste of dust and sand, broken by lines of tents, huts, and incinerators. By moonlight it was etherealised, as everything in Egypt is, and the changing colours of the sunset and the afterglow in these desolate places are always some little compensation for the monotony. In the east the setting sun caught the peaks of distant sandhills with its level rays. Many photographers attempted the evening view of the Arab boats with their clustering masts, at the north end of Lake Timsah.

But the camp itself was just as ugly as desert camps always are. Nearest the road were the officers' lines, usually bell-tents

with one marquee for a mess, then a wide space decorated with a large marquee for orderly-room, then men's tents aligned according to the books, then large mess-huts made of light timber covered with matting, then a very wide space dotted with incinerators, and finally the horse-lines, covered also with a roof of matting supported on posts. This applies to the infantry, the artillery being similarly disposed, except that they had far fewer tents and far larger horse-lines, their guns being parked close to the road.

The pipe-track to Railhead ran alongside the road, and we drew all our water from stand-pipes at intervals. The part of the camp nearest to the Ferry—what one might call "Bridgehead"—was entrenched and wired. On one occasion when an attack was feared, the G.O.C. was said to be contemplating the move of all units "inside the wire." It was this happy coincidence that enabled me to obtain permission to move my Lilliput unit to the just-vacated brigade H.Q. site on Lake Timsah, thereby exchanging a weary waste of sand for a prospect of water and shipping, bounded by green trees. At intervals a new General took command of the area.

But though trenches came and went, though bridges were built in case we all had to bolt during the night, one feature always persisted, in this part of the Canal defences, and that feature was "Eyewash."

Where our men shone most notably was in the design of regimental crests. The principal ingredients were a large stock of pebbles and broken glass of every imaginable hue, and—unlimited time! The regimental artist is summoned when a sloping platform of earth or sand, say 6 feet square, has been arranged, facing the road by which the General-to-be-conciliated will approach. Taking as his model the common or garden cap-badge, the artist reproduces the heraldic beast or device of his unit—a ferret, an acorn, or a giraffe—in marvellously blended colours. Here one sees the delicate *grisaille* of a Rose's Lime Juice bottle, the darker hues of Guinness, the iridescent sheen of Johnny Walker, the opalescent tints of softer drinks. Mingled with them are oyster-shells or any common objects of the camp that may be enlisted in the cause of art.

I remember one camp near Ismailia where Eyewash was

carried to the highest pitch of my own short experience. Every battalion had its broken-glass crest, visible to the jaded traveller by train, or delaying the passing traffic on the road. The field ambulance, moreover, exhibited dwarf walls of mud, carefully whitewashed and studded with flags. The next unit, not to be outdone, accentuated its angles with pampas-green. In another camp were some very pretty fancies in Reckitt's Blue posts and whitened ropes. The same unit had laid out a formal garden in the officer's lines. The Colonel rashly asked me what I thought of it, and when I said that it reminded me of Versailles he became quite frigid, as Colonels will.

But Eyewash ceased to play any dominant part in our lives after once we left the Canal, in the winter, for the march to Palestine. We had something else to think about.

When the troops at Ferry Post were not employed in polishing themselves or "whitewashing the desert" (as the Australians called it), they were lucky in being able to escape to Ismailia for an occasional afternoon. Ferry Post Camp itself did not abound in facilities for relaxation. Leave to England was almost out of the question. During the summer a rest camp was opened at Sidi Bishr, near Alexandria, where, once a week, detachments of Tommies were sent with an officer, and allowed to squeeze as much enjoyment as they could out of sea-bathing. Unfortunately, barely half the troops could be spared to take their turn for a holiday—richly as they deserved it—owing to more than one scare that resulted in everybody being recalled at a moment's notice.

My own tastes inclining rather towards solitary sketching and something picturesque and green, I spent part of my week's leave in exploring Damietta (see Chapter VI.), returning across Lake Menzaleh for a few days' luxury at Port Said.

Not only did I get a week's leave far from the madding crowd, but three subsidiary and flying visits to Cairo during the six months.

Apart from these jaunts, visits to Ismailia were unusually frequent in my case, as duty often took me there two or three times a week. On other days there were occasionally inspections. Though such functions were rather awesome, they had their bright side. Once a divisional commander and all his Staff

turned up outside my humble dwelling at 6.40 a.m. I had had no warning of their intentions, but, luckily, was "properly dressed" in the Army sense. I had not met "Brasso" before, but knew him by his slacks, his white helmet, and his pipe, which he invariably smoked on state occasions. The whole crew was mounted on camels. I was given the one remaining, bestraddled it (my first experience of the noisome beast), and thereafter maintained a respectful but involuntary interval of half a mile behind the G.O.C., to whom I was supposed to explain certain details of sanitation. These related to manure-dumps, a branch of economics that would have been tabooed before the war, but is now a constant source of merriment in English comic papers. In Egypt a manure-dump is quite respectable, rather like an ash tennis-court, and not at all resembling the French article.

When we had all arrived there, the General's attentions were diverted by the struggle of a G.S. waggon and team that had stuck in the neighbouring sand. To my great amusement, he despatched all his monocled and betabbed Staff to put its aristocratic shoulder, literally, to the wheel. Meanwhile he shouted at me, and, having reduced me to pulp, suggested that I should give him my views just as I should to "an ordinary man" in a London street, but my imagination was not equal to the task. I was so unnerved that, when the signal came to "proceed," instead of remounting my slow camel, I clambered on to somebody else's which was very fast, incidentally just a trifle faster than the General's. This led to more shouting, but we left all the others behind, and it was well worth it.

The transport camels, with their blue-pinafored drivers, were always with us, and their camps or "lines" were scrupulously clean. But we had still more picturesque neighbours on the lake, in the shape of the famous Bikanir Camel Corps. These Indians, with a streak of red in their khaki turbans, are fine-looking soldiers, mainly Rajputs of high caste, and they have servants of low caste who do all the menial work of the camp. There is one curious feature in the dress of some of their English officers that puzzled me for some time, an epaulette of fine steel chain on each shoulder. The object of this, I am told, is to deflect a hostile sword. Such a possibility almost carries one back to the Middle Ages! The Indian officers of the same unit are also

a problem to a Britisher, even when he learns the difference between a *Subadar* and a *Jemadar*, and all the rest of them. So also in the Egyptian Army. Should a British Captain salute a *Kaimakam* or a *Lewa*—(*a*) if the senior is British, (*b*) if he is Egyptian? Should I salute H.H. the Sultan, as I certainly have done when in doubt as to procedure? Is an Indian medical officer with two stars right in saluting a British R.A.M.C. captain with three? and so on.

The oddest "colour question," so called, arose in Ferry Post between a regiment of British West Indians from Jamaica and the natives of the Egyptian Labour Corps. The former, in most cases coal-black, woolly-haired, banjo-strumming coons, looking as if they had come by the last boat from the Swanee River, called the bronze Egyptians "niggers"!

The "Sambos" or "Golliwogs," as we nicknamed them, varied in every shade from white to black, but, on the other hand, the Egyptians were more often brown than black, the latter shade being peculiar to the Berbers and Soudanese among them. In the E.L.C. I have even seen a few white-skinned men with fair hair—"Dagoes" down on their luck, I suppose—but I have also seen black N.C.O.'s of the B.W.I.R.'s drilling white privates in their squads. Apparently all Jamaicans have equal rights in the Army, the colour question not being allowed to arise. The Golliwogs were mostly good swimmers and divers, their dripping black bodies poised on the spring-board suggesting some antique bronze.

But comical as these Christy minstrels always were, whatever they were doing, they were surpassed by the Egyptian Labour Corps, that remarkable organisation which has been of such great service to our Army in Egypt and Palestine, as well as in more distant fields. Its chief value lies in the number of British troops that it has released for more skilled and more martial duties. Hardly less valuable is the infinitely greater capacity for work in great heat of these slim Orientals as compared with our own countrymen, and the ease of feeding them on local produce. Every sanitary officer in the E.E.F. has become accustomed to handling gangs of these natives and to talking to them in elementary Arabic. I have had fifty of them, under the charge of a native *raïs*, or foreman, living close to my

camp as I moved about the Wadi at Gaza, and they never ceased to amuse us. They are recruited all over Egypt, and usually sign a contract for three months. Those from Alexandria and Cairo are often sharper and quicker, but are seldom so reliable and industrious as the rustics from Upper Egypt and the rural Delta, the true *fellaheen.*

They are just like children in all their ways. They squabble and laugh and weep; they dress themselves up in ridiculous clothes; they walk hand-in-hand like sentimental schoolgirls; they splash each other when they bathe. But whatever they are doing, they sing. They sing as they draw the heavy ferry-boat across the Canal by means of a chain; they sing as they dig or carry great weights; they sing as they go to work, and after dark as they prepare for sleep. When at last they leave the Army for their homes, they sing and cheer more loudly than ever as they cross the desert in railway-trucks, waving flags made of any old bits of fabric they can find.

It is difficult to describe their curious wailing music, usually in a minor key. Rhythmical hand-clapping always accompanies the song, which is antiphonal. Some gifted *waled* sings the first line, and the remainder supply the chorus for second line. Then the first singer improvises a third line, followed again by the chorus, and so on alternately. The improvised portion of the song is topical, and is suggested by the whim of the singer. He may speculate as to the time that their present work will last; as to the food that they will get for their next meal, the personality of their commanding officer, the greed of the *raïs* for *backsheesh;* or he may expatiate on the delights of his native village and its damsels. But the chorus is usually one of these two refrains: "*Kàm lil' o kàm yum*" ("How many nights and how many days"), or "*Yà habèbe sàlamàt*" ("Oh, sweetheart, my greetings").

In addition to these interminable songs, the Egyptian labourers are very fond of the reed-flute as a musical instrument, though its aimless tootling can hardly be called music. It is a worthy accompaniment to the famous *cancan* or *dans du ventre.*

But it is a question how far we Westerners are justified in criticising primitive music. At Ferry Post there was an excellent

R.A.M.C. choir with some three songs, each of which I must have heard rehearsed in the Y.M.C.A. hut near my tent scores of times. There was also an ex-piano in the same Y.M.C.A. hut, an instrument that worked far harder than anything or anybody else in the camp, and the only thing that never required a *siesta*. There were excellent gramophones provided by the Red Cross for the sick, and very welcome in officers' messes. These one thoroughly enjoyed, when they brought Clara Butt and the Queen's Hall to Sinai. Even Harry Lauder was welcome. Wagner was a favourite, and a dreamy waltz heard at Romani on Christmas Day made me feel more home-sick than anything previously in the war.

But, after all, what the Army likes best is rag-time or equally vile American parodies of good music—turning waltzes into two-steps and fugues into waltzes, and disguising the National Anthem as a fox-trot. So long as this standard of taste prevails, we cannot laugh at the simple African with his beating tom-toms and bleating on reeds.

At the far end of Ferry Post Camp, on the margin of the desert, was a small enclosure of barbed wire which afforded much sport to the numerous photographers of the brigade, and entailed some little supervision by myself. Here were quartered the Bedouins who came through our "front line" from the wilderness beyond, and here they stayed until their period of quarantine was over. All through the summer quaint little family parties arrived, stayed a few days, and then moved on into Egypt. Usually they had a few camels, ill-nourished and small. A herd of sheep and goats lived in the enclosure with them. The men wore a white garment, and round their heads two rings of camel-hair rope. The women generally wore shabby black or dark blue robes, dragging on the ground, and rows of coins and beads as necklaces. Some of them must have carried hundreds of coins in this way. They always covered their faces if a visitor approached, a contrast to the bolder demeanour of the ladies of the Libyan Desert. As a rule, they appeared to be miserably poor. Occasionally they were led by a very old man. Their whole existence was strangely reminiscent of the Old Testament story—patriarchal, nomadic, and very simple.

On one occasion a youthful subaltern of my division went to

photograph the girls of the party in the usual way, and was attracted by a handsome bead necklace that one of them was wearing. The interpreter happened to be present, and opened negotiations with the patriarch. After some discussion the old man named a price of 20 piastres (about 4s.). The subaltern handed over the necessary cash and waited for the necklace. Then there was a momentary pause, and the interpreter, seeing that there was a slight misunderstanding, added: "The money you have paid, of course, also buys the girl." Without a second's delay the youthful son of Mars fled back to camp, minus the necklace and, presumably, poorer by 20 piastres.

Such enlivening incidents as this were, however, all too few. I remember that once the A.P.M. invited me to shoot jackals by moonlight, and though my revolver badly needed using, the proposal somehow never materialised.

The arrival of mails and newspapers was our chief interest. In those days letters from home arrived usually twice a week, and took less than a fortnight on the trip. One longs for a return to such conditions now. Newspapers were hawked through the camp as dawn was breaking by breathless boys. The paper bought by the great mass of the Army published a special "Canal Zone Edition." This priceless journal afforded us much amusement and told us a certain number of facts.

During the months spent on the Canal, I lived for some time with a field ambulance; then, when it was rushed off at the end of July to take a share in the fighting round Romani, I joined the mess of a casualty clearing station. Such a unit, when no casualties are forthcoming, is not overworked. Nor is a field ambulance that is not in the field. But of the two, the former can always make itself the more comfortable. It is equipped to move by train, and its baggage is not so rigorously limited.

These rambling recollections of life on the Canal may be concluded by a short description of the outposts and camps east of Ferry Post in the desert. The greater part of the Canal defences was very similar, and what applies to the Ferry Post sector would equally picture the neighbouring sectors of Ferdan on the north and Serapeum on the south. From each of these large camps on the Canal a road, a pipe-line, and a Decauville railway ran, more or less parallel, to another camp at the Rail-

head, five or six miles farther east. Somewhere near Railhead the road forked north and south to two road-heads. The pipe-line forked too, and supplied water-dumps at each road-head. The water was drawn from the Sweet-water Canal that supplies all the Suez zone, and thus, primarily, from Father Nile.

Trains on these light railways were very uncertain in their habits. The only one that never started late left Ferry Post at 6 a.m., or a fraction earlier. Very often it ran off the lines or broke down in some other way, but one became very philosophical about delays of a few hours. The rolling-stock consisted of open trucks. There were no passenger coaches, and, until just before I left the Canal, no overhead cover. So one sat, sometimes for hours, on the floor of a truck in the full heat of the day. The metal parts were so hot that they literally burned one's hands. The most comfortable seat was on a bag of forage or a bale of compressed fodder (*tibban*). As a rule, the train took about forty minutes over the journey. Alternative means of transport for myself were on horseback, on a cycle, or—best of all—in a motor ambulance. The last-named was, however, only occasionally available, as economy in petrol was practised here much more than in Cairo or Alexandria.

The desert between Ferry Post and Railhead was very hilly and wild, with fine views in the evening, and considerable variety of colouring—due to different geological formations—at any time of day. Railhead Camp itself was wonderfully concealed in a dip among the hills. To the east of it lay a finely shaped sand-dune named Australia Hill, and a couple of miles or so beyond the outposts, on a chain of sandhills with a grand view to the east, where the blue shoulder of the Maghara range could be distinguished among a welter of smaller peaks and ridges. This was perhaps the finest panorama of unbroken desert that I have ever seen—the "Central Tableland of Sinai," across which ran the "Way of Shur," according to Biblical historians. Not a sign of life or vegetation was visible.

Between the sandbagged redoubts, held partly by infantry and partly by Anzac horsemen, ran a continuous line of wire, and from each of these lonely outposts about two miles walk across the sand brought one to the nearest road-head. Life out there was peaceful enough during the summer, but hardly

luxurious. It was a long strain in the great heat, yet the men who were there often told me that, except for the bathing, they preferred the desolation and the silence to the life at Ferry Post. But the exception is a considerable one! To some extent, conditions were mitigated by running a "bathing-train" every afternoon, which stayed at the Ferry for a couple of hours or so, and carried a detachment of the Railhead garrison.

CHAPTER V

ISMAILIA

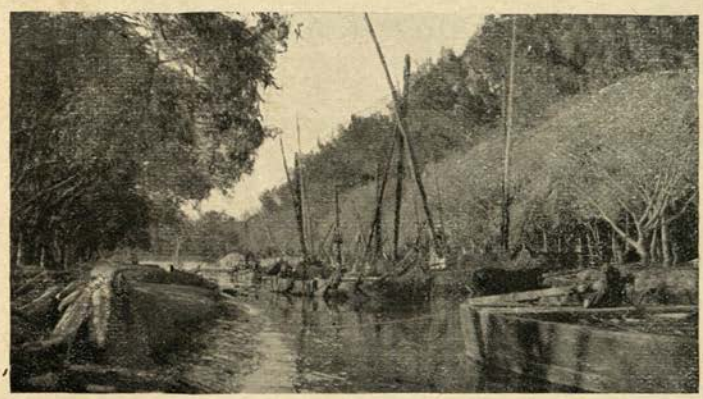
LOOKING back on my six months spent on the Canal, I cannot understand how any normal man could fail to consider himself lucky to be stationed at Ismailia. It does not possess the mild climate of Alexandria, nor that city's resources for entertaining sportsmen and philanderers. It has none of the Oriental charm or fashionable bustle of Cairo. It is surrounded by no glamour of antiquity such as one finds at Assouan or Luxor. But in those more fashionable towns one feel's one's self to be merely a semi-civilian, or a tourist under false pretences. Ismailia, on the other hand, was sufficiently near active operations in 1916 to preserve some semblance of a military centre. There was no need to explain one's presence there or to apply for a pass if one wished to drop in at the Club.

But the standard of comparison for such places varies with different temperaments. To me the charm of Ismailia consisted almost entirely in the contrast that it afforded with the glare and monotony of the desert. The drinks may have been inferior, the shops were few and modest, but the gardens were a feast of verdure and blossom. Whole avenues of golden mora trees laden with brilliant scarlet flowers and huge clumps of purple bougainvilleas were the chief contributors to a blaze of colour. One might almost say that Ismailia appeals to a traveller in Egypt just because it is so un-Egyptian. Its character is essentially French or Italian rather than Arab. Yet it does not resemble closely any of the Riviera resorts that it first recalls. The vegetation is more tropical; the boats on the Sweet-water Canal are like those that one sees on the Nile.

Perhaps the impression is more subtle if one analyses it. To anybody who has assimilated the atmosphere of Latin Europe, it is a great relief to turn from a wilderness of uncongenial camp



THE SUEZ CANAL, FROM FERRY POST.



BOATS ON SWEETWATER CANAL.



PUBLIC GARDENS, ISMAILIA.

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routine to a place that recalls pleasant memories of France or Italy. It carries one back to one's travelling days before the shadow of war came. The sudden uplift that every Sentimental Journeyman feels, as he emerges from some tunnel under the Alps into the brightness of the South and the fairy-like beauty of Maggiore or Como, represents a definite charm that Ismailia possesses in some small degree and the rest of Egypt does not. Egypt has its own beauty of atmosphere, palpable enough to any prosaic traveller through the Delta or the Valley of the Nile. But life on the desert is a very different thing. The sunshine is too blinding and the landscape too crude. When one has lived in a desert camp for a few months, the natural craving is for something green and civilised. And this is just what Ismailia supplies.

It is almost impossible to believe that only fifty years ago the site of the town was a waste of sand. Where the blue waters of Lake Timsah now stretch for several miles towards Suez, there was then a reedy marsh. Ismailia is entirely a product of the Suez Canal. It was laid out by French people on French lines.

Before the Canal was constructed there was no Port Said, but, whereas English shipping interests have largely altered that flourishing town and rendered it cosmopolitan, Ismailia, up to the declaration of war by Turkey, remained predominantly French. All through the Canal-building operations, from 1859 to 1869 it must have been a busy hive of industry, and when the work was completed most of the officials took up their residence in comfortable villas on its shady avenues. The town itself was founded in 1862. It was planned as a residential place for Europeans with the native quarters on the west. But in the year 1877 fever appeared, becoming more and more virulent each year, till in 1902 the number of cases had reached 2,209 in a population of under 12,000. This led to the famous investigations by Sir Ronald (then Major) Ross, which resulted in the discovery of the transmission of the fever by the *Anopheles* mosquito. This insect bred freely in stagnant pools round the town, but Ross's treatment of the pest was so successful that in 1903 the number of cases dropped to 213, and each succeeding year the improvement was progressive. It is curious that a modern town, with comparatively good sanitation, should thus have provided the

field for one of the most important scientific discoveries of recent times. On the other hand, just because Ismailia was a new settlement surrounded by desert, it was possible to limit the number of mosquito breeding-places to an extent that it is impossible in large irrigated areas like the Delta, the Nile Valley, or the Fayyum. Very appropriately, a lecture on "Mosquitoes in Egypt" was given to us at Ferry Post, by a great authority on tropical diseases, who had found many species of the insect in the woods and cultivated areas round Ismailia.

At one time liners embarked passengers from Cairo at Ismailia, anchoring in the lake, but this was eventually found to be unsatisfactory. The railway from Port Said was at first only a steam tramway, but in 1904 this was superseded by the ordinary gauge and linked up with the Suez-Cairo line at Ismailia. On the west of the town, where the large Moascar camps are now situated, is the Sweet-water Canal, running north to Port Said, the southern arm, to Suez, being diverted at Nefisha Junction. Ismailia is thus the half-way house and clearing-house for all the Canal traffic, and became doubly important when G.H.Q. of the E.E.F. moved there in 1916. The town is named after the Khedive Ismail. Some of the streets are named after the promoters of the Canal, thus, the Rue Negrelli, the main thoroughfare of the town, commemorates one of the engineers. Port Said bears the name of Ismail's predecessor, and the memory of the great pioneer of the whole project, Ferdinand de Lesseps, is perpetuated by the remarkable statue outside the harbour. Ismailia has no antiquity, but it has a distinct personality, derived from its close association with the inauguration and prosperity of the Canal.

From Ferry Post Camp, on the east of the town, to Moascar Camp on the west, is a trifle under four miles, and the town lies slightly nearer to Moascar than to the Ferry. High above the Canal, on a bank overlooking all the surrounding country and the whole area of Lake Timsah, stands the group of buildings that housed G.H.Q. throughout the summer of 1916. These buildings were originally the Canal Company's hospital, and the blocks are connected by covered ways. But when G.H.Q. arrived they were naturally rearranged to suit their new purpose.

It was a favourite after-dinner walk of some of us from the C.C.S. Mess, across the Ferry, up the steep sandy cliff, and along the avenue to G.H.Q. We did not go there to see the Staff in all its glory, but merely to study the maps of the various theatres of war. These maps were numerous and large. They were pinned along the boarded walls of rabbit-hutches full of intelligence people in a certain corridor. Those of the French front were magnificent, with every enemy trench marked. Even the unpronounceable names in British East Africa and the Balkans became familiar to us, as the little coloured flags moved up and down with the arrival of each day's news. Only one theatre of war was unrepresented there—the Sinai Peninsula. There was not even an outline map to show the positions of Romani, Abd, and other places of which the names appeared in the occasional laconic despatches. Fortunately, some of us had been supplied with excellent maps from our own headquarters, enabling us to follow the fortunes of our neighbours on the north.

Ignorance of the geography of Sinai and Southern Palestine seems to have been fairly considerable in certain usually well-informed circles at home. A leading illustrated paper published, in July, 1917, a map that appeared to be carefully drawn. But on closer inspection one found that it must have been compiled from a few casual references in "a letter from the front" that accompanied it. The military railway was shown running through Katia, not through Romani; the branch from Romani to Mahamdiya, and thence to Port Said, was not shown at all; the terminus was shown at Khan Yunus instead of at Deir-el-Balah, and no hint was given of the line to Sheikh Nuran. The position of Mahamdiya was twenty miles in error. Romani, Katia, Rafa, and Sheikh Zuweid were indicated as towns, though the former pair have not a single house between them, and the latter pair are wretched mud-built hamlets. Rafa was described in the letterpress as a "port," and other names were misspelt. This was almost the only instance when I have seen any attempt made in the English illustrated Press, up to the autumn of 1917, to depict our movements in map form, and it is obvious that the draughtsman had no reliable material at his elbow to serve as a basis. In November, 1917, a map showing "the advance in Palestine" was printed in one of our foremost weeklies. It

showed the line south of Gaza as it was before the battle there in the previous April!

G.H.Q. was surrounded by a warren of huts and tents where the small fry lived. But the more eminent of its inhabitants rolled away from work each day in large cars, down a long avenue that skirted a corner of the lake, to less Spartan accommodation in the town. This aveunue, bearing various names in different parts of its length, ran without any considerable deviation right through the town to Moascar on the far side, where it was prolonged by the metalled road that was later extended to Zagazig and Cairo. Cars loaded with Generals and Staff-officers whirled up and down its length day and night. Heavy lorries ran from the sidings by the Canal up to the railway-station.

For visiting Ismailia a bicycle was the best mode of transport. Often I went on horseback, but there were several drawbacks. Either one had to clatter across the pontoon bridge, or, if that were closed, cross the Canal in a crowded ferry-boat, wedged among soldiers and donkeys and carts and camels. The most placid of nags abhors the propinquity of a camel, probably because of its offensive odour.

Once across the Canal, one rode across the rail sidings and past a great Ordnance depôt, then turned away from the long avenue on to the sand, and finally arrived in Ismailia through a pinewood. A mounted officer whose mission was limited to tea or a drink or a visit to his tailor, or even to an interview with a Great Man, could—if he had no tame groom of his own—leave his horse in the care of one of the Arab boys who were always lying in wait at a certain crossing. But one was tied to one's horse. And if one wished to spend an evening at the Club, as was often the case, a horse could not be left at a street corner for hours.

A bicycle, on the other hand, had no likes and dislikes on the ferry-boat. It could be left in the stand in the Club garden while its owner played tennis or visited his chief. It waited patiently during his very lengthy dinner, and then, after he had propelled it down the long dark avenue, it could be hoisted into a small boat to be rowed across the Ferry. That nocturnal ride will always live in my memory. Almost every Saturday evening I lit my lamp and left the Club between ten and eleven. The

avenue was pitch dark when the moon was not up, and the brilliant headlights of big cars that passed at thirty miles an hour left one quite dazed. The nights were always perfectly silent except for the croaking of thousands of bull-frogs in the branch of the Sweet-water Canal on my right. The volume of noise that they made was extraordinary. It sounded loud even at my camp across the lake, two miles away.

At the Ferry one was challenged by a sentry. The pontoon bridge was not available at night, being left open to allow ships to pass through. After 9 p.m. or so the big ferry-boat was only used for motor cars on urgent duty. One therefore had to call—after the fashion of Lord Ullin's daughter, but in Arabic—for a dusky boatman to row us o'er. Generally there were two natives, who lifted my bicycle more or less skilfully into the boat, and offered a moist hand to me as I followed.

Going into Ismailia from the Ferry, one passed through various woods and gardens. On the left was the frog-haunted Sweet-water Canal, and, crossing it by a swing-bridge, one reached the finest gardens. They extended along the shore of the lake for half-a-mile or so to the Avenue de l'Impératrice, which runs from the railway-station to the little landing-stage. In these gardens, shaded by pine-trees and bowered in sweet-scented blossom, dwelt the hard-worked Staff of the division. The G.O.C. himself and another subsidiary General occupied houses in the town. Across the beautiful avenue that ran through this earthly paradise were the tennis courts, where Mars and Venus met together. Mars was, as a rule, a Staff officer or some similar appendage of G.H.Q. The vulgar herd across the Ferry were seldom able to join in the jousting. People like myself, who were easily able to slip into Ismailia at any time, but possessed no social gifts, watched the twinkling of shapely ankles and the flash of merry wit with detached admiration. Venus was distinctly in the ascendant. She was not always a thing of surpassing beauty, but she was invariably very bright. Her father was probably a grey-bearded French or Italian official of the Suez Canal Company, slightly inclined to *embonpoint*, cordial and polite, but a trifle dazzled by Mars with his red tabs. If Venus had a husband, that unfortunate fellow must have prayed for the end of the war and a return to unruffled domesticity.

Mars was decidedly amphibious. He had a pretty taste in bathing-costumes, and joined Venus among the jelly-fishes just beyond the long row of little white boxes by the shore of the lake. The Sisters from the hospital also met their brothers-in-arms in this way, and there was much splashing and fun. The crocodiles after which Lake Timsah is named never disturbed these simple sports.

On the landing stage a handful of Tommies and civilians were usually to be found, watching the yachts skimming over the lake or the sun setting behind the sand-dunes. A few motor-boats were tied up at a wharf close by. Once my chief took me down to Serapeum, seven miles south of Ismailia in one of these delightful craft, to inspect the camp. It was a memorable trip, with a glorious sunset as we returned. The Serapeum camps were as ugly and dull as others, but we saw the site of the Turkish crossing of the Canal at Tussun in 1915, and the views across Lake Timsah were very fine. Apart from motor-boats, the only craft plying regularly from the landing-stage was a hospital launch, the *Indiana*, which I imagine was one of Cook's Nile fleet in former days. Certainly it resembled that type of vessel, but, as there was a frequent service on the Canal between Ismailia and Port Said before the war, it may have been an inhabitant of the lake for years.

North of the lake was a yacht-club and rowing-club, extensively patronised by officers living in Ismailia, and beyond lay various patrol-boats and monitors. One or more battleships were generally anchored in the lake, two miles out from the landing-stage. Their crews, French or British, were constantly ashore, and their white uniforms provided a pleasant change from the endless stream of khaki. Less frequently Japanese naval men were to be seen.

A branch of the Sweet-water Canal ran through the town along the side of the main avenue, already mentioned. It was spanned by two swing-bridges. Almost always picturesque Arab sailing-boats were moving up and down between the locks that connected this Canal with the lake. At a fixed time every evening the Commander-in-Chief might be seen trotting along the Canal bank, wearing dark glasses and accompanied by one or more of his Staff. His escort consisted of Indian lancers, fine soldierly men, well mounted.



SPHINX OF RAMESES II., FOUND AT PITHOM, IN THE GARDENS, ISMAILIA.



THE SWEETWATER CANAL AT MOASCAR CAMP, ISMAILIA.

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The gardens north of the Canal were small, but interesting because they contained some ancient sculptures, the only vestiges of antiquity in the town. The most striking of these was the group of Ramses II. seated between the gods Re and Atum, facing the entrance to the garden and carved in red Assouan granite. There was also a fine recumbent lion with a human head, of the same period. These monuments were brought here from Pithom—a city referred to in Chapter XI.—from various ancient sites on the Canal itself, and from El Arish. Those of us whose tastes lay in the direction of archæology often wished that the statues had been systematically labelled, with dates and descriptions instead of meaningless numbers.

Almost adjoining these little public gardens was the Place Champollion, so called after the French savant who was largely instrumental in discovering a clue to the translation of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

On one side of the Place Champollion was the Cercle du Canal de Suez, the little Club of which we—as officers in the British Army—were made free, and where most of us spent a good deal of time very pleasantly. Indeed, the French and Italian officials who were our hosts were quite crowded out, and it is a question whether the profits that the Club or the caterers must have made out of the liquid and solid refreshments that we consumed would altogether compensate for the feeling that they were trespassers in their own house. The contrast between the two sections, military and civil, was most noticeable in the early evening. About six o'clock crowds of British officers trooped in, and sat down at the little marble-topped tables in the garden, passing the time until dinner was served with drinks and badinage. At another group of tables—one could almost trace the line of cleavage—were the French and Italian families, who nearly all disappeared before dinner-time. The women were only too frequently in mourning, and their talk was less voluble than it would have been in a café at Versailles or Nervi. They were perhaps conscious of being swamped by the Army. But it was pleasant to see European women and children, and sometimes those fortunate military folk who had made friends with civilians crossed the No-Man's-Land and joined them at their tables. Occasionally our divisional band performed in the Club garden, and once I

listened to a concert given there by the ambulance choir from Ferry Post. During the summer dinner was served out of doors, under the shade of beautiful acacia-trees. Every Saturday evening I cycled up there to dine with friends who were quartered in the town. More than once I came across old schoolfellows, now become indispensable cogs in the great machine.

Dinner was often a lengthy affair, for the small staff of the Club was sometimes overwhelmed by an unexpected rush of officers. If it was unduly prolonged, men who had to catch trains to less favoured stations in the Canal zone had to leave before dessert arrived. Fish *mayonnaise* was usually a feature of the banquet, for both Canal and lake abounded in several species resembling salmon. The same train that took away visitors from Ferdan and Kantara brought our evening paper from Cairo. It was the "Canal Zone Edition," bearing the following day's date, and the Arab newsboy cried, "Paper to-morrow!" pronouncing "paper" as "babor." (The same boy made "Tim-es" into two syllables.) In Palestine in 1917 the case was altered, and the paper was stale before we received it instead of being ante-dated. Then it used to be a riddle for the unwary to ask how to find the date. The answer was, "Look at the top of the newspaper and add one!"

There was a library in the Club, where military bookworms resorted, chiefly to refer to *La Vie Parisienne*. I reluctantly admit that this respectable publication claimed my attention every Saturday before dinner. It would be difficult to say why. Its *penchant* for dainty underclothing was certainly not the primary cause, but rather the wonderful delicacy of the drawing in its numerous if *risqué* illustrations. War, even without fighting, is an ugly, hulking, clumsy thing, and one turns to pictures of pretty faces and graceful figures with the same relief that I felt every time that I came into the gardens of Ismailia from the desert. This may be the explanation of the amazing popularity of Raphael Kirchner's cartoons, which are found in every mess in Egypt, as in France. But there were other papers on the table besides *La Vie Parisienne*, and among them *L'Illustrazione* and *La Guerra Illustrata*, Italian journals picturing the strange campaign in the high Alps, and also telling one just a little of the other Italy that one knew before the war came. For the rest,

nearly all the books in the cases round the room were standard works in French, but there was a useful *Larousse* and a fine historical atlas, sometimes welcome in days when books of reference were very scarce.

Opposite the Club was the establishment of one of the Indian tailors who follow the British Army all over the East. In an adjoining street was a little Catholic church, another link with Latin Europe. There was a café or restaurant where British officers were allowed to go for lighter fare than the Club afforded, and where dinner might also be obtained. There were several other cafés where officers were not allowed to go, and here only could ices be found, a desperate temptation to an officer with a sweet tooth. In the Rue Negrelli were numerous shops where Indian and Egyptian wares were displayed—silks, embroideries, brasswork, and curios. The nationality of their proprietors was very varied, but for the most part they were branches of larger establishmens in Cairo. There were no European shops, except two or three chemists and several places where fancy goods were sold by Greeks.

Soon after crossing the Avenue de l'Impératrice, one arrived in the native quarter. This was, however, very different from the tortuous alleys of the older parts of Cairo. The streets were all at right angles and very short, so that light and air were plentiful. There was, of course, a mosque, and the other necessary concomitants of Oriental life, but in the streets and shops alike the "glamour of the East" was altogether lacking.

East and West met in the local cinema-halls. Every class of the population, military and civil, could be studied at an evening performance in these admirable institutions. The line between Red-Tabs and Tommy, between Mars and Venus, was never harshly drawn there. We sat and watched the blood-curdling adventures of the "Vampires" in Paris unfold before us, or we rocked with laughter as Charlie Chaplin wobbled into view. But what interested me most was to speculate as to the effect of these displays on the primitive African mind. The *effendi* in his *tarbush* probably followed the story fairly well, but what of the turbaned *waled* in the front seats? What did he make of European matrimonial complications? And how would the exploits of Satanas—the leader of the Montmartre

bandits—or of Charlie himself in a Great Bedroom Drama, appeal to his childish understanding? So far as I could gather, much of it was beyond his grasp. What aroused his applause more than anything else were "knock-about turns" involving no problems or brain-work.

Once, and once only, I saw the inside of one of the many large villas that bask in ample gardens along the banks of the Sweet-water Canal. I was taken by a friend to the house of a wealthy Dutchman, to see his fine collection of furniture and *objets d'art*, another æsthetic treat after months of camp surroundings.

Beyond the native quarter, at the west end of the town, one came to the northern branch of the Sweet-water Canal, which wandered through trees and over the desert to Ferdan, whence it ran close to the Suez Canal all the way to Port Said. It was crossed by a little bridge and formed the eastern boundary of Moascar Camp. The latter is familiar to almost all units of the E.E.F. It was the place where many brigades were concentrated before entraining for France or marching across Sinai towards Palestine. It was divided into two portions by the railway. Moascar North Camp was originally planned, I believe, to accommodate infantry units, but became the depôt of the Australian Light Horse brigade, where drafts were trained and equipped.

Moascar South Camp was added in the summer to the area for which I was responsible, and I was familiar with most of its problems when in November a large part of my division concentrated there for the long-expected trek to El Arish. It was not by any means an ideal camp. The site was a long narrow strip of sand between the railway and the main road along the Sweet-water Canal. Both infantry and artillery were unpleasantly congested. Again and again it had been replanned, as various units had bivouacked there for a few days and then melted away. If one was of an inquiring turn of mind and cared to dig down a few inches in the sand under one's tent, there was always the possibility of finding a dead horse or a refuse-pit. Moreover, the camp lay on a road that many important people patronised on their daily rides, with the result that a whole multitude of them had very decided and invariably divergent views about all its arrangements.

The same difficulty applied more or less to the north side of the camp, where Generals sometimes passed, but a good deal of unpleasant criticism was avoided by an unusually liberal use of eyewash in all its most fascinating forms. On this side of the camp, too, was the railway. Here I learned the shortcomings of the Egyptian engine-driver. His whistle is not an occasional luxury to be reserved for certain prescribed occasions. To him it is a super-toy, an admirable contrivance for making far more noise than any number of reed-flutes or brass-bands. And so, as his train covered the mile and a half between Moascar and Nefisha or *vice versâ*, he aimlessly but persistently put the thing into action, waking up the whole brigade if it was asleep, or causing much profanity if it was awake.

Just across the railway in a little enclosure where eyewash was superabundant, though the need for it was not so vital as in our area, dwelt D., my old friend of Chapter I. He had developed, in the course of a few months, from a mere foundling like myself into an Admirable Crichton. Greatness had been thrust upon him. Like myself, he was irretrievably lost when he first landed, but he gradually became a peg on which various newly devised appointments were hung. One of his side-lines was the system of disinfecting trains that became such a feature of Army sanitation in Egypt. They are alleged to have been invented by a certain R.A.M.C. Colonel, but an ill-natured rumour hints that the Hun was first in the field, in this as in other details of the war. The type of disinfector chiefly used on active service is an apparatus not unlike George Stephenson's first locomotive, "The Rocket," in its appearance. It is eminently unsuitable for transport across the desert. I have seen twenty artillery horses careering across the cornfields of Philistia with one of these wretched objects in tow from one of my camps to another—and once the axle broke! But this Thresh disinfector, useful because of its "portable" nature, can only deal with the complete kits of ten men at a time, and a period of three-quarters of an hour is required to disinfect them thoroughly.

Something on a much larger scale was needed to cope with a whole division within a few days. The Thresh disinfector, like other apparatus of the same kind, generates steam which destroys the vermin. Somebody was inspired with the brilliant idea that

an ordinary locomotive might be used for the same purpose. The Egyptian State railways have numerous closed vans made of stout metal plates. Two of these were connected with the boiler of a locomotive by a pipe, the supply of steam being controlled by a simple valve. A third van served as living accommodation for the small staff required. The two steam-heated vans were fitted with wooden racks for clothes, enabling some 350 complete kits to be packed into each. It thus became possible to deal with thousands of men in a single day, and to run the whole train to any camp adjoining a railway. D.'s responsibilities consisted chiefly in moving several of these trains up and down Egypt as they were required, a job eminently unsuited to his high medical qualifications and perfectly manageable by an intelligent sergeant. But such are the ways of Fate.

But even Moascar had its points. North of the camps, between the aerodrome and the Sweet-water Canal, lay a beautiful pinewood of considerable extent. When wearied with much red-tape and fuss, I used to ride there on my docile steed, and walk him through the alleys between the long straight stems of the trees, my reins hanging slack and my thoughts far away from Egypt. For the floor was carpeted with pine-needles and the ceiling was formed of interlacing branches that rustled deliciously in the cool north breeze. It recalled holidays spent in Sussex and long delightful days on Leith Hill. But when I rode back to sand and ugliness and complaints, it was like awakening from a pleasant dream.

South of the camps there was a small cultivated area extending to Lake Timsah, where there was a bathing-place, very different from that at Ferry Post, for it was approached through gardens and palms. The margin of the lake was strewn with shells—I believe of the *murex* species—and grapes grew plentifully in the hedges.

But just as I had discovered the attractions of this corner of the world, the orders came for our departure. Already the last of our brigades had marched away on their long journey, and with them a detachment of my small unit. The rest of us were, fortunately, to travel by train with Divisional Headquarters. The beginnings of another brigade had arrived on the scene, and I had initiated the incoming S.M.O. into the various pitfalls and

gins of his new area. Our baggage was not reduced so drastically as that of other units of the division, because it had never occurred to anybody that we existed at all, so that my unit had been omitted from the "Book of Words" by a stroke of luck. The "Book of Words" was a small tract formulating the exact allowances of baggage for each unit of a "division equipped with camel transport," a comparatively new experiment. Yet even after drastic reductions the amount of stuff packed into those long trains at Moascar sidings was enormous. Much of the work was done at night, by infantry parties who must have been worn out before they were dismissed. But a great part of the modest comforts amassed during six months on the Canal had to be discarded. A zealous Staff officer prowled up and down the trains seeking what he might devour. He pounced on every table and chair that had slipped through the needles' eye. The truck, or portion thereof, that I had with difficulty obtained for my unit was very discreetly packed, but even then his lynx eye discovered a superfluous file for papers, and out it went.

Nevertheless, two things escaped his notice—an iron bedstead that the supply officer held very dear, and a donkey that the Artillery Headquarters Staff had cunningly concealed beneath their gear. These military *impedimenta* did at least start on the long trail, but I fancy that their life was a short one. Our horses were packed tightly in ordinary trucks.

The Army always allows a margin of safety in its time-tables. The train was loaded with baggage on the day preceding our departure, and sentries were detailed for the night. Hours before it was timed to start, on December 6, we had to be seated on the top of our mountains of gear. There was a guard's van next to the engine, where the elect travelled, but I chose a modest seat on the floor of the rear van in less exalted company. Finally, at midday, we moved away from Moascar, past Ismailia, and in an hour arrived at Kantara, already by that time important as the starting-point of the railway across Sinai and as the base for the Desert Column, then eighty miles or so ahead of us. *El Kantara* ("The Bridge") was the point where we were to cross the Canal and thus leave Egypt behind us.

But it was something more than this. It was the beginning

of the ancient trail that led to Palestine, traversed by Kings and armies and pilgrims since the beginning of history. It may have been the very point from which Moses led the Israelites into the Wilderness. It was probably a place where the Holy Family rested during their flight from the wrath of Herod.

In fact, we were about to set forth on the oldest road in the world.

CHAPTER VI

DAMIETTA AND ROSETTA

THE mention of "short leave" in Egypt to anybody in the E.E.F. naturally implies a visit to Cairo or Alexandria from some uncivilised desert camp. But soon after I landed in Egypt the names of the two old Arab cities, Damietta and Rosetta, that lie near the twin mouths of the Nile attracted my fancy. One day I saw in a Cairo bookseller's a coloured view of Damietta from the Nile. A week or so later I noticed in the Arab Museum at Cairo a richly decorated room from a house in Rosetta. From that time I was not satisfied until I had explored both of these ancient towns. "Short leave," obtained with some difficulty and only by immense perseverance, provided the opportunity for seeing Damietta, but French leave had to be utilised in order to visit its rival. However, let bygones be bygones.

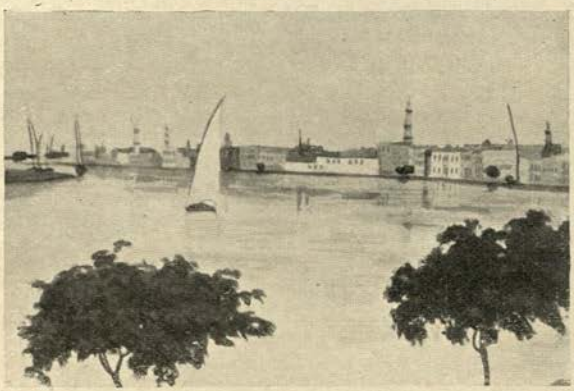
The two places have many features in common. Each of them is a mediæval port, hardly affected by the march of modern civilisation elsewhere in Egypt. Each forms the terminus of a leisurely railway, and each lies on a branch of the Nile some miles from the sea. They are not, then, as one might infer from a small-scale map, strictly seaports. And the only excuse for including them in a book of this character is that Baedeker and his competitors do not devote much space to them, though both of them—and especially Rosetta—must have been visited by inquisitive tourists from the E.E.F. in their intervals of leisure. Whether either town has ever been graced by a garrison during the present conflict I do not know.

Damietta figures largely in the history of the Crusades, but its remote past is very obscure. It bore the name of Tamiathis in ancient days, and fragments of architectural detail of that period are still to be seen, incorporated in the walls of later Arab dwelling-houses. But that in itself proves nothing, and

the fact that no tangible evidence of its existence in the dynastic periods can be found is enough to wipe it off the slate of the Egyptologist. It appears in the story of the Arab conquest of Egypt in A.D. 639, when it successfully resisted an attack. But with the inauguration of the Crusades it assumed a more important aspect, and even in the time of Napoleon it formed the base from which his naval reinforcements set sail. The town which Saladin, among others, fortified did not occupy the present site, but lay on the east side of the river. It survived a siege in 1196 during the Third Crusade, and again during the Sixth Crusade in 1218. At the Third Lateran Council in 1179 it was actually laid down as a principle that "the conquest of Damietta should be the first object of every Crusade, and the maintenance of the kingdom of Jerusalem only the second." Though the siege of 1218 only resulted in the capture of the castle, operations were continued as reinforcements arrived from France and England, and in the following year the Crusaders entered its gates with high hopes of booty and revenge. But of the 70,000 men whom report had stated to be in the city, only 3,000 remained, for pestilence had done its deadly work. Damietta was then strongly fortified with a triple wall and bastions. On an island in the Nile was a great tower, and chains were stretched across the river. The Crusaders were on the west bank, and attempted for some time unsuccessfully to capture the island tower. They were led by John of Brienne, King of Jerusalem, one of a family that looms large in the history of these wars and of Apulia in Italy. For three years the struggle continued, with varying results. For a time the Christians held the place, but their camp was flooded and they suffered severely from fever. Many dramatic incidents of the fighting are related by the old chroniclers. But in 1221 the Crusaders abandoned Damietta to the Turks, and returned home.

It next appears in the account of the Eighth Crusade, led by St. Louis of France, and recorded for us to-day by that very competent annalist, the Sieur de Joinville. In the year 1249,

> "on the Thursday after Pentecost, the King arrived before Damietta, and we found there, arrayed on the seashore, all the power of the Soldan—a host fair to look upon; for the



DAMIETTA FROM THE NILE.



THE NILE AT DAMIETTA.



MERSA MATRUH.

To face page 98.

> Soldan's arms are of gold, and when the sun struck upon them they were resplendent. The noise they made with their cymbals and horns was fearful to listen to."

Nevertheless, the Crusaders landed, with all the pomp of knightly heraldry, and in November the army left Damietta under the protection of a small garrison, in order to advance on Cairo, or "Babylon," as it was then called. Their original army had consisted of some 50,000 men, and had been swelled by a party of English knights, as well as by the Duke of Poitiers and his men. However, the advancing host was checked at the Canal at Asmoun, just north of the present Delta Barrage, and was defeated. Thousands of the Crusaders were massacred in Mansourah. Finally, after endless ignominies and disasters, the King—by this time a prisoner—was driven to surrender Damietta to the Saracens.

Meanwhile, the enormous ransom that the King had to pay for his liberty was being counted out, and at last the Crusaders sailed away from Damietta and from Egypt, never to return again, for this was the last Crusade. It is a sad story as Joinville relates it, a story that shows all the weaknesses of these knights-errant of old as well as their personal bravery in action. And the pathetic passages describing the Queen's anxieties in Damietta show the straits to which the proud French Army had been reduced.

From that day Damietta became an Arab city. Sultan Beybars probably intended to turn over a new leaf in its chequered annals when, in the following year, 1251, he had it completely rebuilt farther west on the river-bank, where the village of Menchiyeh stood. Strategical considerations may have influenced him in his choice of a site, but it is also conceivable that he wished all associations with the Christian occupation to be forgotten.

And an Arab city it remains to-day, with its line of minarets and tall houses along the Nile, a line broken only by a few trees and the white sails of the boats moored to the bank. In some ways, as seen from the station, it reminded me of Venice.

A few passages from my diary-letter written at the time recall my own impressions, and a few incidents of my short visit.

September 15, 1916.—". . . My arrival here was unusual enough to satisfy even the most bored. The station was shabby and very dark—it was 9.30 p.m.—and there were no Europeans among the shadowy turbaned figures on the muddy river-bank. For the first time in Egypt, I was standing in a really Oriental crowd, of whom not one could speak English or French or Italian. After repeating several times the name of the hotel I was seeking, I was hustled into one of those boats with a huge sail that you know so well in pictures, and we swung out across Father Nile in the moonlight. There were six women among the party, all in the familiar black gown with their eyes only showing. They all chatted and squabbled as we crossed the river, with great difficulty as it happened, owing to the tremendous current of an unusually "high Nile," then at the zenith of its flow. A friendly stranger piloted me most of the way through the dark, deserted streets to the hotel, and a policeman then acted as my cicerone.

"The hotel itself, rashly described in Baedeker as 'good,' was a bit of a shock. By daylight it looks fairly safe externally, but that night it hardly compared with the hostelries I have stayed in at Cairo and Luxor. It is about equal, in its appointments, to a second-rate *albergo* in a small South Italian town, and miles below the standard of a small commercial house in more civilised parts of Europe. It is kept by a Greek, and neither he nor his minions speak a word of English or French, but he fortunately knows enough Italian to meet the case. Last night I slept little, for it was hot and very noisy. As I lay awake I wondered whether the officers I had left in the mess were not right after all, and whether I was not mad to go to a place that was not a household word. I got up and consulted a time-table, debating whether I should go on to Cairo as soon as possible, and give up this little trip as an error of judgment. But I went to sleep, determined to suspend judgment till daylight at any rate, when I had seen a little more of the place and had interviewed the 'Captain of the Port,' an official who, I had been told, would give me advice if I called on him.

"Breakfast, consisting of four eggs, some dry bread, and

some quite drinkable *café au lait*, came up to my room. There were no egg-cups, but the food was eatable. Then I called on the 'Captain' above mentioned, who turned out to be an obliging and pleasant Egyptian. After the inevitable coffee and cigarettes in his office, he insisted on showing me all the sights of the place in person, and with the aid of a pair-horse victoria—the usual Egyptian cab. He spoke only a little English, but very good French, and in that tongue we conducted our discourse. He did not confine the pilgrimage to antiquities, though it included a couple of mediæval mosques and a beautiful panelled room, but he took me to several small factories and to the municipal waterworks and power station. The latter institutions are modern enough, but I was disappointed to see that all the electrical plant and engines came from Berlin, Deutz, Hanover, and Budapest, while the filtering plant was American-made. Far too much in Egypt does one see that German and American push has driven British industry, which should have so considerable a start, clean out of the field.

"The small factories that I saw dealt with rice, silk, furniture, and shoes. My guide told me that they are almost entirely in the hands of natives, and that there are very few foreigners of any sort in the city. The particular silk-mill that I saw was incredibly dirty. All the looms were worked by hand, by patient slit-eyed Egyptians, and many small boys were employed. The raw material comes from China. In the furniture-works almost everything was copied from European catalogues—a sort of bad Louis-Seize, one might call it—and all the wood seemed to come from America or other distant places."

September 16.—"The city itself is certainly very picturesque. There is a fine view of it from my bedroom windows, especially as my room occupies an angle of the 'hotel' and has windows facing two ways. Across the river the banks are all covered with date-palms in full fruit, and I am simply amazed to see the amount of dates that one tree can carry. The bunches I saw yesterday were so heavy that the fruit from each tree would have filled a good-sized cart. And, of course, this great mass is suspended a considerable

height from the ground. In one particular plantation alone there are 11,000 trees!

"In the afternoon I had arranged to go with my guide to Ras-el-Bahr, a bathing resort at the mouth of the Nile about eight miles from here, and, in view of what he had done for me in the morning, to ask him to dinner there. But the horses in our vehicle were old and tired, and they resolutely refused to proceed after they had gone a few miles, in spite of an amount of whipping that made me feel quite miserable. So we came back, but had a delightful view of the rich fields of cotton, rice, and maize, and of those all-pervading palms.

"In the evening I was feeling rather bored with the shabbiness of the hotel, and had just come to the conclusion that perhaps Food was more important than Art after all, when something happened. Just outside the hotel there was moored one of those resplendent vessels in which English irrigation officers and other public servants live an apparently charmed life. I determined to go on board and see who was there. At that same moment the owner appeared, invited me on deck to have a smoke, and followed that up (after a judicious interval) with an invitation to dinner. This was enjoyable, for he was full of interesting information. Also, he was a keen and, I imagine, a competent artist. He shared all my enthusiasm for the glorious view of the river and the shipping and the silhouette of domes and minarets seen from his deck, first in the delicate evening light, then through all the wonderful changes of sunset and afterglow, and lastly—as we sat with cigars—in the witchery of an Egyptian night.

"These officials are very busy just now, for the Nile has risen to a great height, and a few days ago it burst its banks. Luckily, this occurred close to where this inspector lived, and at a point where he could get a large amount of material and a crowd of willing workers. But it must have been a nerve-racking experience for him. The Nile near Damietta is tremendously deep, about 150 or 160 feet.

"The inspector went away early this morning, but before going offered me the use of his motor-launch for this after-

noon, and thus I had a delightful trip down to the sea at Ras-el-Bahr, a matter of eight miles or so each way."

Ras-el-Bahr is a curious phenomenon. One sees it advertised in the Cairo papers as the hot weather comes, and one imagines a fashionable *plage* with a promenade, where daringly attired *demi-mondaines* cluster round roulette-tables, or, alternatively, as a golfing resort redolent of the British official. It does not in the least conform with either of these ideals. It consists of a series of huts made of matting, ranged in ordered rows on a bare spit of sand between the sea and the river. Across the Nile is a lighthouse and a group of native dwellings. There is nothing else in sight except sand and sea and seagulls. To enjoy a holiday of any length at Ras-el-Bahr one would have to be very tired of town life, very fond of bathing, very satisfied with one's own society, or else very much addicted to somebody else's. For honeymooning purposes it is perhaps a trifle public; there is nothing more suitable for such places than a large hotel in a large town. But it strikes one as a spot where rigid Puritanical standards of conduct are not always observed, and it would be an excellent refuge in certain emergencies. The summer visitors represent all nationalities. Some of the *effendis* and *beys* arrive in their own *dahabiyehs* with their harems on board. The various British and French detachments come in the daily steamer from Damietta, and live in the matting huts. For the unattached, the lovers of noise, and the haters of housekeeping, there is a hotel or *pension*, also of matting, where a breezy French *Madame* presides. Farther west along the coast, about halfway between Damietta and Rosetta, is an even more isolated bathing-place, Brulos Beach, where jaded Europeans live the "simple life" during the heat of the summer.

Europeans seldom stay more than a few hours in Damietta, as they pass through on their way to Ras-el-Bahr, and a foreigner is as much of a curiosity there as he is in Apulia or Calabria.

"You cannot buy an English or even a French newspaper, or a book, or a picture-postcard of the place. There are no European shops, and, stranger still, no European manufacturers. Even the Greeks are practically non-existent for once, and here, as much as anywhere in Egypt,

I should think, one is really in the East. . . . Yet the situation and aspect of the town are beautiful, and are recognised as such by a handful of painters."

The following day I lunched with another English official, and he enlightened me on one or two questions that had interested me since I had come to Egypt. I had just met an Egyptian who had been educated in England and had married an English wife. It occurred to me to ask my host about the usual course of such unions, and his views were certainly informing:

"These marriages are very rare, and almost always turn out badly. After about two years the husband usually says, 'I divorce you' three times in the presence of two witnesses, and then—that's all. *She* has to pay her passage back to England, and her claim on her husband—if she can get it—amounts to 4d. a day. And while she lives in Egypt, even if she has been properly married in England, and even if she does not get cast off, no English woman will speak to her. Nor will an Egyptian woman for that matter. So, to those whom it may concern, *Achtung!*"

He also favoured me with his opinion, based on long experience, of the ways of English and German commercial travellers in Egypt:

"The former are, and were before the war, very scarce indeed, perhaps half a dozen visiting Cairo annually. They stay at Shepheard's Hotel in considerable luxury, and insert a notice in the English paper only—which only English people, chiefly officials, ever read—to say that they will interview buyers between 10 and 12 and between 4 and 5. Meanwhile the Germans, up to two years ago, came in increasing swarms, and systematically visited every shop and bazaar in the city. Twenty years ago everything in Egypt came from England or France. Now Germany is cutting us out all round. Even our best commodity—'Manchester Goods'—is losing ground against German enterprise in catering for the childlike preference of the natives for gay colours. . . ."

". . . The man I lunched with to-day . . . is also a

connoisseur in Egyptian and Oriental *objets d'art*, so he had other topics of conversation. Damietta is simply crammed with old panelling and carving, old carpets, tiles and pottery. It is a perfect mine for collectors, and I wish I could have bought a few things, but one has to live here to find out when and where bargains can be obtained. . . ."

Although Damietta possesses a great attraction for any lover of mediæval architecture, it contains no really remarkable buildings. There are some half a dozen old mosques that merit a visit, but, as in all other provincial towns of Egypt, they do not compare in interest or in beauty with those in Cairo. Outside the city, near an old cemetery, is the most noteworthy of them, the mosque of Abu-el-Maati, or Abu'l Ma'âteh. This appears to be older than the date of Sultan Beybars' rebuilding, and it contains Cufic inscriptions, as well as many antique columns, of which one coupled pair are regarded as a test of honesty, like those in the mosque Amr at Old Cairo—*i.e.*, an honest man should be capable of squeezing himself between them. This test would certainly disqualify the average modern *effendi*, who is usually of ample proportions.

Near the river are the mosques of El Bahr (with lofty minarets and a university attached) and El Matbulîyeh, the latter founded by that famous builder, Sultan Kaït Bey, in 1475. In the south part of the town is the mosque of Mahini, founded, according to an inscription on one of its walls, in A.D. 1310. Here I attempted a pen-sketch. Near this building is a large Okel or Wakil, one of those great caravanserais such as one sees in Cairo. It is a fine example, but does not appear to be noted in any of the guide-books. The chief "lion" of Damietta is the beautiful panelled room in the house of Abdulla Bey Bakri, near the harbour. Its date was given as 1316, and I am told that an American had offered the owner £2,000 for it.

The long main street or bazaar of the town would furnish many subjects for a camera, but in those days I was limited to a sketch-book, and sketching in a narrow Oriental thoroughfare crowded with traffic and with pestering children is no pleasure. One requires a camera to record the quaint *musharabiyeh* work, the overhanging windows, and the bits of panelling that abound

in the older streets, often pasted over with glaring posters of Charlie Chaplin's latest indiscretion.

Mosquitoes are said to be particularly troublesome in the district, and certainly annoyed me with their attentions, but there is no apparent reason why they should afflict Damietta more than any other place in the irrigated Delta.

I had to decline an invitation from the Egyptian "Governor," or Mayor, to go in his boat to Ras-el-Bahr and spend the night there. It would have been an amusing experience, no doubt, had not Father Time and my natural bashfulness combined to make it impossible. I had planned to spend the last two days of my leave in a comfortable hotel in Port Said.

> *September* 19.—". . . The journey here (Port Said) from Damietta, by lake steamer, occupied most of yesterday, but was thoroughly enjoyable. . . . The only other passenger on the upper deck was a silk-clad and turbaned pasha, who slept most of the time, but 'made his prayers,' kneeling on his carpet, about 4.30 p.m. Several times during the voyage little cups of black Egyptian coffee came up from some mysterious place in the engine-room, and these I gladly drank to pass the time. One had to take one's own provisions for the journey.
>
> "For nearly nine hours we steamed very slowly over the great lagoon called Lake Menzaleh, which you will find charted on even the most putrid of maps. It is very like the lagoon between Venice and Fusina, minus the Alps, and if you consult Baedeker you will find out how many thousand fishing-boats ply on its waters. We stopped once only, at a town called Mataria, given up to fish and smelling of them, but again very like the lagoon towns of Venetia in its general aspect."

The outstanding feature of the voyage was the great expanse of water and clouds around the little paddle-steamer, and the flocks of wild birds that rose as we steamed by their sedgy homes. Lake Menzaleh abounds in wild-duck, pelicans, storks, herons and flamingoes, and is a great resort of sportsmen. The ancient city Tanis, the *Zoan* of the Bible, lies a few miles south-south-west of Mataria, but the remains are very scanty and barely

repay a visit. Most of the objects of interest have been removed to the Egyptian Museum at Cairo. At one time Tanis was among the chief cities of the Delta.

As already mentioned in a previous chapter, the whole geography of this part of the world was altered when the Suez Canal was constructed and a large new harbour was formed at the Mediterranean end of the Canal, known as Port Said. The area now covered by docks and busy streets and tall modern buildings was a desolate lagoon, separated from the sea by a narrow strip of sandy beach, and inhabited only by fishermen and wild-fowl. Before the war Port Said was chiefly noted, to myself and other men in the street, as the wickedest city in the world—according to the novelists. As one sees it nowadays it appears rather a prosaic port, laid out with a view to further expansion and abounding in empty sites. The hotels are good, if not superlatively luxurious; the shops are attractive enough to a visitor from the desert, even if mediocre as compared with those in Cairo; the harbour is smaller than that at Alexandria, but appeared to me to be a whirl of gaiety when I paid a winter visit to it from desolate Mahamdiya. Presumably the pre-war seeker after wickedness made his way into the native quarter, a shabby area of ordinary-looking houses built in rectangular blocks. Each street is fortified against the inquisitive soldier with the A.P.M.'s warning legend "Out of Bounds to Troops," and I could see nothing in the dim vistas beyond to tempt an adventurous warrior to defy the order.

The harbour was interesting enough to a newcomer, but resembled all other harbours in its details. One unique feature, however, is the great statue erected to Ferdinand de Lesseps, the founder of the Canal, on the long stone breakwater that runs for a mile and a half into the sea. From this breakwater one can watch the sunset and afterglow; then, as night comes, the phosphorescence on the waves is very fine. But bathing at Port Said is a violent sport, as my diary testifies.

> *September* 23, 1916.—". . . The chief feature of bathing here is the tremendous surf—a rapid succession of fierce breakers about five feet high—and the strong current from east to west close to the water's edge. This was a great

change from Lake Timsah, and quite a treat. The Casino Hotel has a sort of pavilion where all officers can get a box and a costume for a shilling. Never previously, since I landed in Egypt (except at Stanley Bay), had I worn a costume. On the Canal one never sees a woman except up aloft on the decks of the big liners, and those veiled Bedouin ladies behind barbed wire in the refugee enclosure. But at Port Said the bathing for officers, and for officers only, is mixed. Not as delightfully mixed, of course, as at Trouville or Ostend. When I had my dip on Thursday, for instance, the only representative of femininity, among fifty of us or so, was one brown and chubby girl in a terra-cotta-coloured garment that nearly matched her sunburnt arms. She was evidently no stranger to the company, and later I saw her in the demure garb of a V.A.D. with a downcast eye. The officers at Port Said are more fortunate than those of us who are marooned on the banks of the Canal."

* * * * *

My visit to Rosetta, a year or so after these stirring events, was a brief one, but fortunately I had acquired a camera in the interim. Most of the things that can be said of Damietta apply with equal force to its Arab rival. But Rosetta has never played any conspicuous part in history. In De Joinville's story of the Eighth Crusade he refers to "the stream of Rexi" and "the stream of Damietta," when he obviously means the Rosetta and Damietta branches of the Nile. "Rexi" is the Arabic *Reshid*, and Damietta is known by the natives as *Dumyat*. The famous "Rosetta Stone" was discovered here, but that fact does not justify a certain guide-book in devoting a whole page to the stone and not a word to the Arab city. A traveller who visits Rosetta does not wish to read a whole page about something he can only see in the British Museum. He would rather read about Rosetta. Yet the author only tells us that the present town marks the site of some other town, and that certain events occurred there in the Napoleonic era. He gives no hint of the only possible attraction of Rosetta to a modern tourist—its Arab buildings.

The city lies on the west bank of the Nile, and, as the station

is on the same side, anyone arriving by train can form no opinion as to how the grouping of the minarets and domes would appear as compared with the beautiful view of Damietta from the east bank. From a boat one could obtain a satisfactory panorama, or from the palm-groves across the Nile. Up to only a century ago, Rosetta was a flourishing port. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it had 35,000 inhabitants, and Alexandria only 5,000. Now Rosetta's population has sunk to 14,000 odd, while Alexandria contains hundreds of thousands of people. Rosetta is so near Alexandria that it is bound to suffer from the latter's prosperity, just as Damietta has been injured by Port Said, and now there is no question of rivalry. Rosetta has become an exclusively Arab town. It has a long picturesque bazaar street, partly shaded from the heat of the sun by means of boarding and mats. I saw no European at the station nor anywhere in the town. The most informing guide-book says that there are neither hotels nor inns there. However, a daring attempt on a Greek hotel produced an excellent omelette, coffee, and fresh peaches from the landlord's garden. This collation was served on a verandah overlooking a garden, with a graceful minaret rising from the palm-trees just over the garden-wall. As an alternative one may call at the Franciscan monastery, where hospitality is said to be offered to anyone who asks for it.

Although the town was founded by the Caliphs in the year 870, none of its mosques are of earlier date than the Hegira year 1000 (A.D. 1591). Many of the minarets are very graceful, but not so elaborate as those in Cairo. The outstanding feature of the Rosetta mosques is the elaborate brickwork, red and black, found especially in their "portals" and doorways. A certain amount of faience is also used. The entrance-portal of the mosque of Ali-el-Mehalli in the main street is a characteristic example. Most of these mosques have flat wooden ceilings carried by numerous columns, and the latter are, as a rule, antique. The mosque of El Sakhlun, or Zaghloul, is a very large one, and contains a great number of columns. Its three "*mihrabs*," or prayer-niches, are all formed of brickwork, ingeniously arranged with white plaster joints. Half the area is shut off by a brick wall. It is ruinous and disused. The roof of the vast principal *liwan*, or sanctuary, is formed of brick vaulting

in small squares carried on a heterogeneous assortment of antique columns, some used singly, others in pairs.

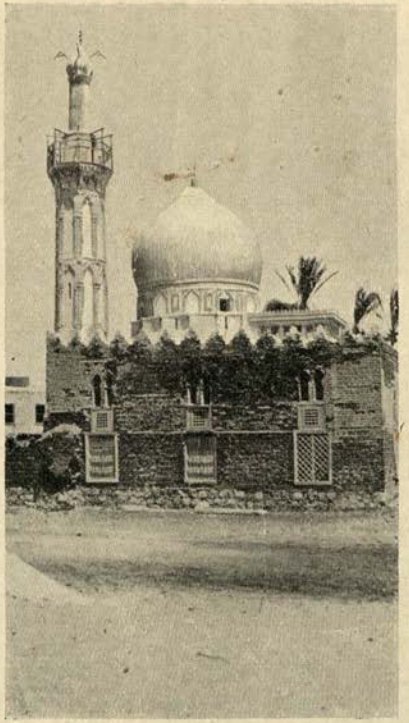
Still more interesting is the mosque of Mohammed-el-Abbasi, at the south end of the town. In this building the local skill in ornamental brickwork may be seen at its best. Near to this mosque one reaches the sandhills that have already covered a large part of the old town.

Apart from mosques the houses of Rosetta are noteworthy. Though plain in their general design, they are remarkable for their great height, for their excellent and sometimes ingenious brickwork, for *musharabiyeh* work of a simple type, and for the antique columns that are built into their angles externally. Opening out of the main bazaar is a curious building of arcades, round a central courtyard, with a fine porch at each end. This appeared to me to be a caravanserai of mediæval date, but I was unable to confirm this guess, and the photograph I took of it was a failure. For the rest, Rosetta is simply a picturesque Eastern town with fine views of the Nile and with ancient *sakkiyehs* and Sheikhs' tombs in its neighbourhood. It lies at some distance from modern traffic routes, in a region of lagoons and marshes, very desolate and presumably very unhealthy.

As I returned to Alexandria by train, a little everyday scene somehow impressed itself on my memory. The train stopped at a wayside station on the sand-dunes. It was an autumn evening and the sun was near setting. One of the village worthies was returning home, and all the population turned out to greet him. Except for a few black-shrouded women, every one of them wore a gaily coloured *gallabiyeh* that fluttered in the gentle breeze. And as they passed chattering and laughing over the little sand-dune, I suddenly realised the extraordinary accuracy of that description of Egypt as "a land of light." There was nothing in this trivial scene that one could describe in words, and it was so elusive that it would almost defy Turner's brush. Yet the evening light on pink-and-white and saffron-and-purple robes against the brilliant background of sand and sky ethereal-ised all these prosaic elements into a perfect picture. Even in the Italian Lakes or on the Riviera one sees nothing like this miracle of atmospheric change and colour.



OLD ARAB HOUSES, ROSETTA.



MOSQUE AT ROSETTA.



ROMAN LIGHTHOUSE AT PHAROS.

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CHAPTER VII

THE LIBYAN COAST

THE following four chapters interrupt the course of my personal narrative, for they describe the various districts on the western frontier of Egypt where fighting took place against the Senussi, chiefly between November, 1915, and March, 1916. This remarkable "side-show" took place while the majority of the troops in Egypt were either at the base camps or on the Canal, but most men who took part in it eventually joined the Eastern Force in its march across Sinai into Palestine. My own acquaintance with those outlandish places only commenced at a time when all the fighting was long over, and normal conditions had returned.

The story of that brief but exciting campaign has already been well told, in books of vivid impressions written by eye-witnesses as well as in official despatches. The *terrain* was almost unknown to most people in England, and the pleasant atmosphere of a Holy War shed a lurid light over the story. The dramatic rescue of the survivors of H.M.S. *Tara* by the armoured cars supplied the necessary touch of limelight. But the actual story of these prisoners' sufferings, though it describes the utter desolation of the Libyan plateau with relentless accuracy, is one of the most haunting and terrible records imaginable.

The most remarkable feature of the campaign seems to have been the way in which German submarines landed officers, munitions, and money at the little harbours near the Anglo-Italian frontiers, so frequently and regularly that the Senussi were able to commence and carry on the war.

The hinterland of these regions, before the war, was almost unknown for two very good reasons. It was for the most part a stony and waterless desert, difficult to traverse, and it possessed few features of interest for any ordinary traveller. The coastal district, on the other hand, was comparatively accessible, yet it was hardly more familiar than the interior.

In view of recent events it is curious that almost the only popular and modern book describing this region is the work of a German. Herr Ewald Falls came out from Frankfort o/M. in 1905 with Monsignor Kaufmann to explore the site of the ancient city of St. Menas, south-west of Alexandria. Their researches were as thorough as one expects from Teutonic savants, and have since been published in a series of admirable monographs in German. But Herr Falls also wrote a more popular book describing his own various experiences during the excavations, and in 1913 an English translation of it appeared under the title "Three years in the Libyan Desert." It contains much interesting information as to the explorers' methods; it describes the excavations at Abu Menas; it gives details of the habits of the Libyan Bedouins, and narrates the incidents of the author's journey with the Khedive to the then almost inaccessible oasis of Siwa.

But it appears to me to have an additional interest in the light that it throws on German political methods before the war. Here is an innocent archæologist strolling over an obscure corner of Egypt, availing himself of the assistance of English officials, and apparently interested in nothing later than the Roman period. He is a German to the soles of his boots. He makes a note of places where he sees German machinery, and we find that at the little harbour of Matruh—the only inhabited place on the coast beyond Dabaa—a German engineer was boring for wells. He points out that the "Khedivial" railway from Alexandria towards Matruh was largely due to German enterprise, and that German material was everywhere employed. (Probably there will be a good deal to be told about that railway some day.) It is significant that he carried round his neck "the official German route-books," and that the names of nearly every previous explorer that he quotes are German too.

But that is not all. He discusses the strategic importance of the Khedivial railway. He describes the enthusiasm of the Bedouins at Abu Menas for his native land. The Kaiser's birthday was celebrated there with great rejoicings. The Senussi were dissatisfied, the possibilities of sedition were excellent. There was universal hatred of the English, especially of Lord Cromer's iron rule.

> "In 1906-07 the enthusiasm of the Bedouins for the German Seignior overstepped all bounds. The large date-caravans to Farafra and Siwa . . . were all frantically enthusiastic for the rights of the Grand Seignior. The two Sultans, the Turk and the German, allied, would rule the world. An old Senussi priest in the Agube said that English power, once attacked, would not reach farther than her ships' guns."

Next follow various estimates as to the extent of Senussi influence, the number of armed men that could be raised, the cost of stirring up sedition, which he thinks would be quite cheap! He considers the possibilities of setting up a great "Central African kingdom" at the expense of France and England. (This was before the conquest of Tripolitania by Italy.)

> "There is every sign that within a measurable space of time the Senussi will establish politically their Central African kingdom, and in a form which promises a longer duration than the bloody rule of the Mahdi in Omdurman."

This book, it must be remembered, was published *before* the war.

North-Eastern Egypt appears on most maps as an expanse of virginal whiteness. Many explorers have trekked across this area—Rohlfs, Camperio, Haimann, Pacho, Smith-Parker, Schweinfurth, Junker, Hartmann, Barth, Minutoli, and others—and most of them have written something of their experiences or finds. But very little is actually known of the land itself or of the people who inhabited it in past ages. That is partly because there is very little to be known. Herr Falls says that Libya, up to the Tripoli frontier, "has been less explored than the darkest districts of Central Africa and the Great Desert." So far as topography goes, an immense amount of good work has been done during the present war, and all important areas, however inaccessible, have been surveyed by the ubiquitous Light Car Patrols. Scientists in Cairo envy those of us whose duties have carried us into these strange places, and I was myself urged to run after butterflies and beetles for one Government department, who would be only too pleased to lend the necessary tackle!

One of the first difficulties that confronts anyone who tries to

describe these regions is the lack of convenient geographical boundaries and names. The tract of coast to be considered in this chapter, for example, has no definite name. It extends from the western corner of the Delta, at Alexandria, to Sollum, on the Anglo-Italian frontier, 310 miles away. For the sake of convenience I have called it "the Libyan Coast." This definition at once provokes questions as to the origin of the name Libya, and the boundaries of Libya in ancient times.

Herodotus appears to use the name in two ways. Sometimes he seems to imply the whole continent of Africa. Thus he mentions its circumnavigation by the Phœnicians, then again by the Carthaginians; he next describes an unsuccessful attempt, when a certain navigator was ordered to pass the Pillars of Hercules and to return by the Arabian Gulf (IV. 42-43). At other times he appears to refer more specifically to the country immediately south of the Mediterranean. Possibly this apparent looseness of description may be explained by the fact that in those early days navigators had only the vaguest idea of the vast extent of the African continent, and no knowledge of the equatorial or southern regions. They may well have believed that the Libyan Desert was the end of all things till one reached the southern sea at the Cape!

He describes in some detail the various Libyan tribes, their customs, and the local fauna:

> "Beginning on the side of Egypt, the first Libyans are the Adyrmachidæ. These people have, in most points, the same customs as the Egyptians, but use the costume of the Libyans. Their women wear on each leg a ring made of bronze; they let their hair grow long, and when they catch any vermin on their person, bite it and throw it away. In this they differ from all the other Libyans. They are also the only tribe with whom the custom obtains of bringing all women about to become brides before the King, that he may choose such as are agreeable to him. The Adyrmachidæ extend from the borders of Egypt to the harbour called Port Phrynus" (IV. 168).

Port Phrynus is considered by some authorities to be the modern harbour of Sollum. After describing other tribes whose territory

lay beyond Port Phrynus, and thus across the present western frontier of Egypt, he continues:

> "Such are the tribes of wandering Libyans dwelling upon the sea-coast. Above them, inland, is the wild-beast tract; and beyond that, a ridge of sand reaching from Egyptian Thebes to the Pillars of Hercules. Throughout this ridge, at the distance of about ten days' journey from one another, heaps of salt in large lumps lie upon hills. At the top of every hill there gushes forth from the middle of the salt a stream of water which is both cold and sweet. . . ."

Herodotus then describes the natives of the Siwa Oasis, which, with his description, forms the subject of the next chapter of this book; and afterwards deals with the habits of the Nasamonians and Lotophagi, the celebrated lotus-eating tribes who lived west of the present Anglo-Italian frontier—the former near Augila and on the east of the Gulf of Sidra, the later in modern Tunis, west of the Gulf of Gabes. He then describes the customs of the wandering Libyans (IV. 186-190), and the fauna of their land (IV. 192).

It is easy to recognise in Herodotus' "two-footed mice" the little jerboas that are common in both Egypt and Palestine. As regards "land-crocodiles," he probably refers to the huge monitor lizard, of which I saw two specimens in Southern Palestine, measuring between 2 feet and 2 feet 6 inches from head to tail. Many statements in his description of country and people are as true to-day as when they were written. The inhabitants of Eastern Libya must always have been nomadic, owing to the droughts, and the rapidity with which water and pasture are exhausted in any one place.

Whatever may have been the case in his day, the area south of the coastal region can no longer be called the "wild-beast tract," for it is unusually arid even for North Africa. Ostriches are no longer to be found there, though they still exist south of the Libyan Desert.

Returning to the writings of the ancient geographers, one finds a new name appearing for Eastern Libya. In the works of Scylax (*c.* 320 B.C.), of Strabo, and of Diodorus Siculus (first century A.D.), the tribes inhabiting the area between the modern

Gulf of Sollum and the western end of Lake Mariut are described as the Marmaridæ, while another tribe, the Adyrmachidæ, occupy the Mariut district. Pliny follows Herodotus in assigning the former area to the Adyrmachidæ, and places a new tribe, the Mareotæ, on the shores of Lake Mariut. Ptolemy observes the same general classification, but subdivides the coastal region east of the present frontier among the Aniritæ, Zygritæ, Chattani, Zyges, Goniatæ, Mastitæ and Mareotæ. On the coast he recognised these settlements between Sidi Barrani and Mersa Matruh—viz., Zygris, Chettæa, and Zygis.

From this welter of names we may select two that seem to be fairly generally accepted. Marmarika, the area of the Marmaridæ, extended for some 251 miles from the Gulf of Sollum to a point some 50 miles west of Alexandria, about where the modern station of El Omeiyid stands. Mareotis, the land of the Mareotæ—a name preserved in the modern Lake Mariut—was the district between Marmarika and Alexandria. Although one cannot fix a hard line on the map to say exactly where the boundary between these two districts lay, their features are so different that some rough division must be drawn between them for the purpose of any description, and the old names of Marmarika and Mareotis meet the case.

Marmarika was the scene of all the fighting with the Senussi in 1915-16. Generally speaking, it consists of a strip of undulating scrub-covered country on the sea-coast, diminishing in width from east to west, till at Sollum the great cliffs of the Libyan Plateau reach the sea. This area is very sparsely cultivated at present, and can never have been rich agricultural land. Under present conditions I have been unable to compare authorities accurately, but there seems to be general agreement on some of the classical sites.

The group of hills between Bir Fuka and Matruh is the Katabathmus Minor of the ancients; Ras-el-Kanais is the promontory of Hermæum; Mersa Matruh is certainly Parætonium; the modern Mahadah is the harbour of Gyzis or Zygis; Ajoubah is Apis; the harbour of Sollum is Panormus; the great cliffs above Sollum, with the pass down to the sea where a Roman road is still marked on large-scale maps, are the Katabathmus Magnus. Just over the frontier is Ras-el-Melh, the ancient promontory of

Ardanis, and the modern Italian Port Bardia may be the site of Petras Magna.

The only part of Marmarika to be described in this chapter is the narrow coastal strip of uplands already mentioned, for when once one climbs the steep escarpment forming the northern boundary of the Libyan Plateau, one simply reaches an arid and featureless level desert, extending southwards for hundreds of miles. The coastal strip must always have been Marmarika proper, for no human beings could ever have chosen to live on that waterless and stony waste. But before reaching the few describable spots in Marmarika, one passes through the old district of Mareotis.

Though no fighting ever took place between Alexandria and Matruh, garrisons were posted at several stations on the Mariut Railway, so that Mareotis may reasonably be regarded as interesting to many soldiers in Egypt. It differs in character from Marmarika, for it includes a large area of cultivated ground. Lake Mariut lies some 8 feet below sea-level, and has greatly varied in size at different periods. Eight islands rose from its waters. Like Isola Bella in Italy, each island was covered with stately villas and gardens. Round the banks of the lake were vineyards, and both Horace and Virgil praise its white vines. Herr Falls states that he and his chief confirmed the existence of ruins of eight coast towns in the province of Mareotis. He quotes Herr Brugsch to the effect that a town existed in Pharaonic times on the site of Marea. "Scarabæi and cylinders are found far in the desert, especially on the edge of the desert." In the Middle Ages the lake dried up, and the bed was cultivated. But in 1801 the British cut through the dunes at Aboukir to isolate the besieged city of Alexandria. The sea rushed through the gap, 150 villages are said to have been destroyed, and thousands of natives drowned. Herr Falls, with the natural sensitiveness of his race, sheds a tear over this early example of military *Schrecklichkeit*, and contrasts with British brutality the labours of Mohammed Ali and the late Khedive to reclaim all the bed of the lake for agricultural purposes. The area still remaining to be reclaimed amounts to 77 square miles according to Baedeker (1913), to 80,000 acres (125 square miles), according to Herr Falls, writing a few years earlier.

The lake is inhabited by thousands of flamingoes. Its vast expanse, broken only by a few fishing-boats, closes all views from Alexandria southwards. The Mariut Railway crosses it by an embankment nearly three miles long. In Roman times there was constant communication with Egypt by means of the Nile canals, so there must have been many boats sailing over its waters.

The Mariut Railway was a venture of the late Khedive. At the outbreak of war it had reached the neighbourhood of Bir Fuka, about 130 miles from Alexandria and about 50 miles from Mersa Matruh. Nowadays, however, Railhead is at El Dabaa, 102 miles from Alexandria. It does not appear to be quite certain what was the ultimate objective of this line. It was certainly intended to run to Matruh. Herr Falls in his book states that the Khedive intended to prolong it as far as Sollum, on the present Anglo-Italian frontier, over 300 miles west of Alexandria, making a port there and so shortening the sea-voyage to Central Europe by nearly two days. He considers that it had a certain strategical importance; that, when Sollum was reached, there would be war between Turkey (then in possession of Tripoli) and Egypt; and that for this reason it was vetoed by Lord Cromer. He also states that the Khedive intended to run a branch line from Matruh to Siwa, 200 miles to the south, for the date-trade. To anybody who knows this part of Western Egypt —its sparse population, its inhospitable soil, and its great waterless areas—it is difficult to believe that any such scheme could be financially successful. The full history of the promotion of this railway, in which German enterprise took so prominent a part, will no doubt be revealed after the war. Travelling on it at the present time is not luxurious, though less uncomfortable than on the purely military lines. But dust rising from the track is a nuisance, as on the Luxor-Assouan line, and even in winter it covers the inside of the compartments and their contents with a white film.

The first station of any importance after leaving Alexandria is Amria, thirteen miles along the line. Here there is a small town and the headquarters of the civil authorities. The Khedive's villa is also here, and there are numerous vineyards, gardens, and orchards. When I passed through it in the early days of 1918, boys were offering great bunches of white narcissi for sale to

passengers on the train. At Amria a young English lady has been carrying out a very interesting experiment for over a year, having organised a school and factory where Bedouin women refugees are being taught carpet-weaving. Living alone in a remote and comparatively uncivilised village, where not very long ago feeling was far from friendly to the Government, she has acquired an extraordinary influence over the Bedouins, and settles disputes or offers advice in all sorts of curious cases. But recently Amria has become a military centre, and its isolation is a thing of the past.

Some thirteen miles farther west is the station of Behig, known to many soldiers and also to archæologists, for very different reasons. But this station is likely to become more important very shortly, when a new garden village that is being planned rises from the green plain. Here will be the seat of new Government offices for the district, and also new premises for the carpet-weavers. Eight miles south of the station lies the famous buried city of St. Menas, the scene of Herr Falls' labours with Monsignor Kaufmann in 1905-1907. It dates from the fourth to fifth centuries A.D., and covers an area of some 4,000 square yards. St. Menas himself died in A.D. 296. His city included one magnificent basilican church of large size, two smaller ones, and a number of other interesting buildings. Full details of these, with excellent illustrations, are to be found in Monsignor Kaufmann's published monographs in German.

North of Behig, near the sea, are two less familiar but noteworthy ruins. These mark the site of Taposiris Magna, which, with Parætonium and Apis, was one of the three principal ancient cities on the coast between Alexandria and Sollum. The modern name of the place is Abousir, and there are no houses to disturb the loneliness of the surroundings. On a low ridge separating the former bed of Lake Mariut from the sea stands a great Roman-Egyptian temple, 295 feet long. It was probably dedicated to Osiris, but little remains of any detail or ornament to-day. The great pylons, grooved as usual for the festal masts, and the lofty stone walls still remain. Near the temple are a variety of chambers hewn in the solid rock, some with vaulted roofs, some containing wells. A few hundred yards from the temple rises the ruined base of a lofty Roman stone *pharos*, or lighthouse. From

this point one commands a wide stretch of sandy coast, as well as of the cultivated area towards Behig. My own duties, fortunately, led me, on camel-back, to the coast-guard station that lies between the two ruins, so that I was able to combine recreation with business. The ride from Behig had given me some idea of the wealth of the flora that in February, a month later, blossoms all over these barley fields and pastures. We crossed whole fields of asphodel, and also a few patches of large anemones. Near the sea I found many old English friends, trefoils and dandelions among them, as well as several unknown flowers. Very few Bedouins were visible in the neighbourhood, and in the five-mile journey from Behig to Abousir I only saw one tent to account for the large area of cultivation.

Of the Libyan camel Herr Falls writes as follows:

> "The noble hairy camel of the Auladali . . . for months together is content with the nourishment afforded by the scanty spring vegetation, and for the rest of the year makes no demand whatever except for drink every four or five days. The hairless animal of Upper Egypt, the 'beaneater,' seems to belong to an entirely different species."

He describes the tribal divisions and customs of these Bedouins in some detail, concluding thus:

> "In my estimation the whole tribe of the Auladali could have easily furnished 6,000 armed horsemen, taking into account the entire Libyan coast plateau west of the Delta of the Nile."

Going west from Behig, the first station of any note is Hammam, the ancient Menokaminos, a small village near the railway, with windmills; then one comes to El Omeiyid, where is nothing more important to see than a lonely lighthouse on the beach and a coast-guard station. The country that one passes in riding from the station to the sea is sandy uplands, plentifully covered with asphodel and scrub. Here one is near the boundary between the ancient provinces of Mareotis and Marmarika, which some scholars think was once marked by an additional mouth of the Nile, flowing out from near the apex of the Delta through the Wadi Natrun, and thus explaining the

remarkable formation of that strange valley. It is even thought by some that the "waterless river" mentioned in Isaiah (xix. 5-10) —". . . and the river shall be wasted and dried up"—was this now lost arm of the Nile. After passing El Omeiyid the line crosses a desert tract, with the station of Alamein in its midst, and at eighty-five miles from Alexandria is Sidi Abd-el-Rahman. On the right of the line is the white pilgrimage-mosque giving its name to the station. This was formerly a centre of the Senussi cult. It stands very prominently on a little ridge and commands a fine view. Between here and the dazzling white beach, with its coast-guard station, is the usual expanse of sand and scrub. But there are large cultivated areas in the district, including tomato-gardens. At Bir Beta there are wells, palm-groves, and extensive gardens. Here one finds mint, heather, sage, asters, wild violets, and white clover. Between Rahman and Ras-el-Kanais is the stretch of pasture-land known to the Bedouins as Agube Minor. In this area is the Railhead station of El Dabaa, the ancient Zephirium, with a mosque, a number of official buildings near the station, and coast-guard barracks near the sea. Near the station there are also a large number of the typical black Bedouin tents, large and low, arranged in long straight lines. In the scanty patches of cultivation one sees the Bedouins ploughing, often with a camel, or with a camel and a donkey, or a camel and a horse yoked together. The native wooden plough is very small, and a man can easily carry it over his shoulder. All the way to Matruh the country is very similar, except that the black tents become less frequent. Flocks of black-and-white sheep and goats browse in the scrub. I am told that rain falls in very spasmodic bursts west of Alexandria, and that certain areas—which the Bedouins seem to know—are always dry, while others, for no apparent reason, are well watered. No foreigner could understand the native system of land tenure prevailing among these tribes, and their boundaries are only known to themselves.

Between Dabaa and Matruh, a matter of eighty miles, there is a fair motor road over the undulating rocky ground. It was constructed by the late Khedive, but in ancient times there was a road all along this coast. About twenty-seven miles from Dabaa one passes the village of Bir Fuka, consisting of a group

of native dwellings without any feature of interest. The escarpment of the Libyan plateau lies far to the south. I made the journey from Matruh to Dabaa one winter morning on a vehicle that had once been a Ford car, but had come at last to a state that was admirably described by the name painted across its bonnet, "Odds and Ends." It was less like a car than anyone in England could imagine. All superfluous fittings had been removed, and little besides the chassis remained. There was a seat of sorts, supported on iron brackets. It had, however, no ends, and as we bumped over stones and rock-ledges at a modest twenty miles an hour, I could only maintain my hold by gripping the back of the seat behind the driver. My valise was strapped on somehow to the creature's tail, and by a miracle was still in position when we reached Dabaa. On the return journey my pilot, an officer who had been careering over these wild steppes for more than a year in "Odds and Ends," had as his passenger a General of considerable dimensions, with leather suitcases that must have suffered in transit before he reached Matruh. A second car started from Matruh with us, and when about half-way it unkindly broke in half. Its driver was cheerfully left to do the best he could for himself, with a rifle and some rations, and probably a tube of stickphast. He seemed quite resigned to a wait of a few hours, about forty miles from anywhere.

Throughout the operations in the winter of 1915-16 the principal centre of interest was the little port of Mersa Matruh, the only permanent settlement of any sort in the district, which, for the sake of convenience, I have called Marmarika in this chapter. Near here were fought numerous actions, and here was British headquarters for the greater part of the campaign.

Mersa Matruh is a small harbour or lagoon protected from the sea by a long line of rocks that form an almost continuous reef. A narrow opening in this reef allows vessels of moderate size to enter the harbour, except in very stormy weather. It is one of a series of similar lagoons on this part of the coast, and only a spit of sand separates it from its neighbours on east and west. On a promontory that divides the eastern end of the lagoon from the sea stands an old Turkish fort, somewhat castellated in design, orange-coloured, and now rapidly falling into decay.

So far back as the times of Alexander the Great, Matruh was



OLD MATRUH.

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a place of some importance. In those days it bore the name of Parætonium. Less frequently it is referred to by classical writers as Ammonia, probably because it was the port from which travellers to the Oasis of Siwa or "Ammon" set forth. When Alexander himself made his famous pilgrimage, described in the next chapter, to consult the oracle of Jupiter Ammon at Siwa, he started from Parætonium. Its harbour is said to have had a length of 40 *stadia*, but was difficult to make in bad weather. The place was distant 1,300 *stadia* from Alexandria. Antony stopped here after the battle of Actium, and at that time a Roman garrison was stationed here. The usual legend connects it with Antony and Cleopatra, whose numerous honeymoons seem to have extended at various times all along the coast of Egypt. In later days Justinian fortified Parætonium, making it a frontier post to defend Egypt against an attack from the west.

Comparatively little remains to-day to indicate that there was a city of any importance on the site of Matruh in ancient times. The land-locked lagoon west of the present harbour appears to have been the harbour of Parætonium, and remains of a masonry quay are still visible at its eastern end. Near the modern mosque, but just within the present wire perimeter, are ruins of a stone building of some description, with a well or subterranean passage communicating with the beach. One of the chambers in this structure appears to have had apsidal ends. It is commonly called Cleopatra's Villa. Before the winter of 1915 there was probably a considerable portion of the building still intact, but a large part of the stone seems to have been utilised in the construction of an adjoining redoubt. On the south side of another lagoon, east of the present harbour, are some flights of stone steps, apparently of great age, ascending from near the water-level to the top of the terraces of natural rock surrounding the lagoon. In Matruh itself is one very large cavern, hewn in the solid rock, that was once apparently used as a catacomb. In the rocky region between Matruh and Dabaa there are many other similar excavations. Herr Falls mentions them:

> "Interest is further awakened by the frequent presence of large tomb-chambers in the hills and slopes of the valleys, with from ten to fifteen loculi for the reception of the dead;

a few belong to prehistoric times. The caves of Abu Schasar in Kanais and those in the settlement of Abderrasi Abu Reiim near Mersa Matruh are the largest. The entrance to the last is decorated with a fragment of an antique frieze with denticulation."

Besides the various ruins mentioned above, numerous smaller relics of an old civilisation have been found by enterprising soldiers since the war, and by natives and civilians before it. I have seen terra-cotta vases of various simple and graceful designs, lamps of the same material, coins with effigies of Roman and Ptolemaic rulers, and some vessels made of delicate glass, very light and of iridescent colours. It is said that necklaces and other ornaments with turquoises set in them have also been found. Excavations among the ruins of Parætonium, under the direction of American archæologists, were interrupted by the war.

From this date I can find no records of Matruh in history up to modern times, though doubtless systematic research under more favourable circumstances would yield a certain amount of information. Mr. Oric Bates, in his treatise on "The Eastern Libyans," does not appear to have dealt specifically with the place, though much may be deduced from his writings as to the customs of the ancient inhabitants of these regions. When the Prussian General Minutoli came here a century ago, he found only ruins and hostile Arabs. It was not until the late Khedive commenced his schemes for developing Marmarika that Matruh came into prominence. It was his intention to encourage the cultivation of large areas in the neighbourhood, as well as in the Kanais district farther east. But water-supply seems to have been a difficulty. Brackish water can be obtained almost anywhere on the beach by digging. There are wells in a small garden or palm-grove about a mile east of the town, where water fit for camels and for washing purposes is found. This garden is full of vines, fig-trees, pomegranates, flowering shrubs, and vegetables. It resembles some of those little enclosed gardens that abound in the district between Rafa and Gaza in Palestine. But for drinking-water the troops at Matruh are dependent on supplies brought by sea, or the condensing-plant installed near

the harbour. The war-price of coal in Egypt makes that latter means of supply almost prohibitively expensive. When Herr Falls visited Matruh more than ten years ago, he found German engineers at work with boring apparatus. They made trial holes from 100 to 200 yards deep in the rock. They struck clay at depths varying from 80 to 100 yards, then chalk, and it was hoped that a layer of grey Nubian sandstone would be tapped at a lower level still. But the experiments were unsuccessful, and eventually the operations were stopped.

In spite of this, a large area of land round Matruh is under barley. There are numerous stone farmsteads all over the district, and the familiar but unappetising "Dead Sea fruit" is to be seen everywhere sprawling over the ground. The glory of this neighbourhood is the spring flora. In February and March the desert literally "blossoms as the rose," but, unfortunately, my duties in this coastal region ceased just before the blossoming commenced. When I was last at Matruh in November, a number of flowers were shooting up through the sandy soil—among them pink and yellow spurge and sea-mint.

The sand all round the harbour is of a brilliant and dazzling white, quite troublesome to the eyes in the summer. Among the little bushes of scrub that dot the beach one finds clusters of the beautiful white amaryllis or "Mex lily," the latter name being derived from the village of Mex, west of Alexandria. How these dainty blossoms extract any nourishment from the sand is difficult to understand.

The colony of Greeks and Italians that constituted the population of the place before the war was dependent on the sponge-fisheries and on trading with the neighbouring Bedouins. Herr Falls, after noting that the sponges of Western Egypt are "distinguished for their beauty and fine quality," goes on to describe the system of fishing at the time of his visit. Traders from the Turkish islands of the Archipelago bring little fleets of eight or ten boats, each

> "with a crew of eight men, and provided with an Egyptian licence which costs £4 a year. . . . During the summer months a thousand Greeks, on an average, do business in the port, and earn yearly, it is said, £20,000. The season lasts

from May to October, and extends over the whole coast as far as Sollum. The sponge-fishers are fine types of Greek islanders, and are extremely pious. At their own cost they maintain a church and priests at Mersa Matruh, the only Christian church in the whole of the west of Egypt, protected by the cannon of the fort, which commands the harbour and the town."

Owing to accidents caused by defective diving-helmets,

"The Government has at last forbidden the use of the diving-helmet under heavy penalties, and so the men dive naked, provided with a rope and a marble stone, which takes them down a depth of 25 fathoms. At the first movement of the rope two men draw the diver up again. The necessity of obtaining a Government licence is in the interest of the sponge-fishery, for it renders robbery impossible, and thus the sponges flourish better."

The Greek church referred to in the above extract is a shabby little wooden structure, and is completely outclassed by the white mosque that the Khedive erected on the west of the settlement. This building is the chief feature in the local landscape, and adds a picturesque note to the beautiful view of the bay. But to the natives its claim to celebrity lies in the modern sanitary apparatus installed in the house of the holy man in charge. It need hardly be said that this triumph of civilisation was totally out of place, and is a complete failure.

The "Dago" population, who, with one noteworthy exception, fled to Egypt on a man-of-war when the Senussi threatened to attack the place, occupied a number of houses built in rectangular blocks with ample space between. For the most part, these houses, now occupied as billets by British troops, are one storey high, with large and lofty rooms. The roofs are made of planks covered with mud; the walls of local stone plastered over and covered with a wash of yellow or white. Some bear the Greek names of cafés. Many have floors tiled in black and white. A certain amount of mahogany furniture still remains, and a few marble-topped tables have survived a couple of years' occupation by Springboks and Tommies. Some of the houses are of more

ambitious character, notably that occupied by military head-quarters, and a few have a second storey. One of the latter is occupied by a Greek canteen, another by the proprietor of the café and of the adjoining Bedouin market. This far-sighted merchant, by staying in Matruh when all the other traders fled, has secured a monopoly of all the considerable trade with the natives, as well as a brisk business with the British troops.

There are several orange-coloured buildings in the place where the civil authorities live and work—the Court House, Telegraph Office, and Coast-guard Barracks. The latter were a trial to the sanitarian, for even military discipline does not altogether civilise the Soudanese soldier, still less his wife and children. The wives were also somewhat of a puzzle. Apparently a soldier can keep an extra wife for every stripe he gains by promotion—*i.e.*, one for a private, two for a lance-corporal, three for a corporal, and four for a sergeant. If a sergeant has four wives, they just fill the four corners of his rectangular tent. This must lead to a good many complications.

One of these Soudanese sergeants once carried a parcel for me as I returned to my billet from inspecting the barracks, and on the way he obliged me with a few autobiographical details, in perfect English. He was the son of a negro prince somewhere in the Sahara, in French territory. He spoke English, French, and Italian with equal fluency. At various times he had lived in London, Paris, and Naples; and more than one of his brothers held a commission in a European army.

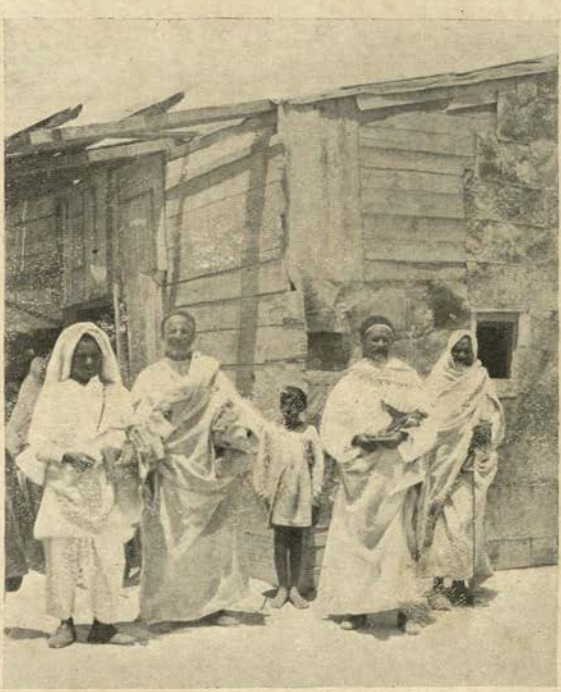
The chief feature of garrison life in Matruh is the bathing, once, or probably more than once, daily. The white sand slopes rapidly into the amazingly blue waters of the harbour, water so clear that on a calm day one can see the green-and-red weeds 10 feet below the surface. In the early pages of that thrilling book, "In the Hands of the Senussi," the writer, himself a naval man, comments on the same thing when speaking of the coast near Sollum. But at the west end of the harbour at Matruh an offensive odour of sulphuretted hydrogen sometimes becomes very perceptible. This is said to occur before a storm, and to be due to a sulphur spring.

My own work at Matruh was once enlivened by an order to "deal with" a dead and somewhat *passé* turtle that had been

washed up on the rocks near the fort. Dead camels, donkeys, and other small deer, had already come my way, as we trekked along the Oldest Road in the World, but a dead turtle is an unusual problem, and in this case was not a savoury one. However, as usual, the result was a triumph for modern science.

The Bedouin market outside the military area is by far the most interesting place in Matruh. It consists of a wired compound enclosing a number of wooden sheds surrounding an open space. In the sheds are sold cotton garments, tea, sugar, a few other articles of food, and various oddments such as are made in Birmingham. The Greeks who preside over the stalls buy from the Bedouins large quantities of wool in return. One does not easily pick up "souvenirs" at the counter for the folks at home. The wants of the natives are very simple, and a gaudy leather purse—almost as large as an officer's haversack and hung over the shoulder by a rope of coloured cord—was the only peace-offering I could find for my long-lost daughter. The Bedouins all wear these gorgeous purses over their long white *burnous*, or woollen robe, which is one voluminous garment that they wrap over their heads as well as their bodies. They are tall, wiry-looking men with hatchet faces and shaven skulls, very different from the simple-hearted and docile peasants of the Nile Valley. The women trouble little about veiling their faces. Many of them wear robes of red and orange patterns, but as a rule their simple garment is dark-blue, very short—so that a brown leg is seen—and they frequently wear a red sash. One seldom sees a pretty girl among these Bedouins, and the women are as dark-skinned as the men, for, unlike the pale beauties of Cairo, they live in the open air. Their tents are large and low, and they cook inside them. One can generally buy carpets at the native markets, woven by the women in their tents, and sometimes they are of good design. The tents of the wealthier Bedouins have carpeted floors. Most of the women wear heavy silver bangles round ankles and wrists.

Beyond the bathing, garrison life at Matruh is not exciting. The boat for Sollum calls each way on its journey, and thus produces a pleasant feeling of disorganisation. The ration-convoy plies to and from Siwa each week. Occasionally a small naval vessel pays a call, or a car runs down to Dabaa with a Staff



BEDOUINS AT MATRUH.



BEDOUINS NEAR OLD MATRUH.

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officer and returns with an intermediate mail. No newspaper arrives to cheer the garrison with its vapourings, and all the news that reaches the camp comes in the form of short messages by wire, or by rumour with each boat from Alexandria. But the enterprising Y.M.C.A. authorities have provided cinema shows there on several occasions. There is surely no place where they are more thoroughly appreciated.

Rations at these remote stations are not limited to bully and biscuits. All sorts of strange cattle come up from the Soudan to be killed for fresh meat at the little abattoir, wonderful beasts with immense curving horns. The sheep, too, are curious creatures, many of them like poodles in the colour and texture of their fleece, others more like calves than sheep, and all very long-legged, with Roman noses and large flapping ears.

A few days after arriving for the first time at Matruh, the M.O. of the garrison battalion invited me to join a picnic-party that was going to Old Matruh the following day. Rather startled at the invitation, in view of the present international emergency, I nevertheless accepted, and to Old Matruh we went. There is no such place marked on the map, but the name "Nakl Zaragat" seems to indicate its whereabouts. Only a few palm-trees and a well are fixed objects in the landscape, with a background of snow-white sand-dunes rising from the scrub-littered plain by the lagoon. A couple of black Bedouin tents shelter the native population.

The district between Matruh and Sollum is the region of Agube Major, and is ruled by the Senagra branch of the Auladali tribe. A road ran all along the coast in Roman times, and the stations on it are given in the "Peutinger Map." In Agube Major there are only a few unimportant remains of Roman and Arab occupation, but at Sidi Barrani (Bomba) there is a landing-place and coast-guard barracks. My own journeys between Matruh and Sollum were always made by steamer, but a motor ride to Bagbag, between Sollum and Sidi Barrani, enabled me to see a part of the road that is typical of the remainder. The scenery differs little from that on the road between Dabaa and Matruh, but near Sollum the great Libyan escarpment draws nearer and nearer to the sea. The ground is covered with small scrub. The sandhills by the sea are a glaring white, and the sand has a pasty

consistency when wet. There is a constant succession of camel caravans still passing along the ancient coast road. They come, as they always have done, from the distant negro States south of the Sahara, through the chain of oases across the Italian frontier, and thus they make their way to Alexandria along the coast, or to Cairo via Siwa and Moghara. Many of them have traversed incredible distances and suffered great privations on the journey. In the compound at Sollum one sees an extraordinary collection of people from these caravans, with skins varying in colour from the comparatively European tint of the Bedouins to the coal black of Central African negroes. Many are wretchedly poor; others possess large sums of money in English or Italian gold. The Bedouin camp at Sollum is a large one, lying on the beach below the escarpment, and consisting of rows of black tents. At one end is a Greek canteen and buildings for the frontier administration officers. The natives draw their water at a group of wells in a little fig-grove near the British camp. Some of these wells appear to be very old. One evening I was standing by one of them with a friend, when a very pretty child of four years old or thereabouts came with a pan on her small head to draw water. It was too late to photograph her, but we asked her name, and the next day tried to find "a little girl called Mabrouka" (which seems to mean "good luck") in the crowded camp. The Sheikh bustled round, evidently regarding our quest as a huge joke, but even with an Egyptian Major's help we could not trace our small acquaintance. About a quarter of the females in the camp seemed to bear the name of Mabrouka. A few of the less bashful maidens consented to be photographed, giggling violently throughout. Most of these Bedouin girls wear a large amount of jewellery and many rows of coins.

For the natives employed in the British camps at Matruh and Sollum there are special bakeries. The loaves resemble large buns in size and shape, the bread being coarse and brown. A form of "Aldershot oven" is used. All bread for the British troops is also baked locally.

The camp at Sollum lies on a little bay sheltered on all sides except the north-east. The great cliffs of the escarpment rise from the camp area for some 600 feet. A motor road winds up the face of these cliffs at an alarming gradient to the old Turkish

fort at the top, now flying the British flag. At one time a Roman road is said to have followed nearly the same line. At the top one reaches the level stony plateau of the Libyan Desert. The view from the top of the cliffs is magnificent, the coast towards Bagbag stretching away to the east, the rocky cliffs of the frontier region to the north, with Ras-el-Melh in the distance. The sea is incredibly clear. The camp itself is devoid of interest, consisting only of the usual huts and tents. Stone is, however, easily obtained and is thus used in preference to wood whenever possible, for wood is a very precious commodity nowadays. There is no town or village of Sollum, only the Bedouin encampment already described.

Very little is known of Sollum in history. I have seen a fine Ptolemaic coin dug up during an excavation, and some of the maps show "ruins" among the rocky terraces on the top of the cliffs. But the only relics of an older civilisation that I have seen are some rock-chambers north of the camp, so simple in form that they might date from any period. On the Catalan map of 1375 it is marked as Porto Rio Soloma. It seems to coincide with the Katabathmus Magnus of early geographers. Herr Falls says:

> "Ancient remains are not far to seek, both in the gulf itself and in the surrounding district. The ancient landmarks of the Kasr Dschedîd are characteristic of the "new castle," a Roman fortress on the Turkish side above the slopes of the fertile Wadi Dafne, and of the Kasr-el-Adschebia on the edge of the plateau of the Egyptian Agube. The scanty remains of Kasr-el-Adschebia mark a Roman *castellum* that controlled the great, still used north-west caravan route to the oasis Dscharabub and Siwa and to the entrance to Cyrenaica."

Herr Falls also states that the island of Crete, 230 miles away, may be seen from the top of the cliffs at Sollum "shimmering in the distance!" Even allowing for the excellence of German optical instruments, this statement may be safely attributed to mirage.

This district is liable to very heavy storms of rain, so that a torrent, from 1 to 2 feet deep, may suddenly sweep down the dry stony gullies descending from the escarpment to the sea.

In spite of the very sparse vegetation, so scanty that from the top of the cliffs the whole area seems absolutely barren except for a few dwarf palm-trees, many living creatures contrive to exist in the place. Death's-head and oleander hawk moths are constantly seen; scorpions and tarantula spiders lurk in crevices in the rocks. Jackals of various kinds make night hideous. Gazelles abound on the plateau, and occasionally their succulent flesh appears on a mess-table. There are foxes and hedgehogs and hares, chameleons, hawks and larks and wagtails. Sometimes a small blue kingfisher skims over the harbour. Crows habitually perch on camels, picking ticks off the animals' backs, and they often hunt in company with larger birds, such as vultures and kites. The native greyhound is very shy, and is known as a "gazelle-hound."

Life in Sollum to-day is even more dependent than at Matruh on bathing and on the weekly steamer for supplying the element of change. The garrison mess has a sweepstake on the exact time of arrival of the boat. This boat is almost the only link with the outer world. Everybody rises a little earlier and a little more briskly than usual on these days. By breakfast-time the boat should be alongside the little pier; an hour later the mail will be sorted. Then one has only a few hours in which to deal with a week's official correspondence and all the letters that may arrive from England. Generally I lunched off a few biscuits in my tent on such occasions, in preference to wasting an hour by visiting the garrison mess. By tea-time the good ship —— had all our scribbled mails on board, her cargo unloaded, her passengers on deck, and her "anchor weighed." We watched her disappearing, and settled down to another six days of isolation. From time to time a naval vessel might pay us a call, and sometimes would bring an intermediate mail, but this was a rare event.

Sometimes on warm August evenings, when the moon flooded the bay with a wonderful golden light, I went out after dinner in the M.L.O.'s boat. Or the Colonel would ask the junior subaltern to take the large mess gramophone out on to the end of the diving-stage, so that he might hear his favourite song, "The Pipes of Pan," warbled across the water as he sat in a basket chair with a fat cigar.

On the sea-trip to and from Alexandria all lights were

rigorously extinguished. Once, after this had been done with elaborate care by H.M.S. ——, *en route* for Sollum, she signalled to her escort, "Am I showing any lights?" The escort promptly flashed her reply—"You look like a gin-palace!"

In spite of all efforts to provide sport and recreation for the garrison, there were often cases of "fed-up-itis" among the men. A certain middle-aged soldier once presented himself at the garrison orderly-room with an unusual request, proffered with strict attention to etiquette, "through the usual channels." He asked the Adjutant to be good enough to obtain permission from the C.O. for him (the applicant) to be shot at the first convenient opportunity, as he was rather tired of life in Sollum. The Adjutant, with exquisite tact, replied that this procedure, if adopted, would involve a needless waste of ammunition, and that he would have to fill up so many army forms to account for the expenditure of one cartridge that he really hardly thought it would be worth while. The applicant then agreed to the *status quo ante.*

One method of fighting boredom was to stroll over the frontier into Italian territory, which was visible to the naked eye from the fort on top of the cliff. One Thursday the M.O. and I made the experiment and lunched with the Italian Captain commanding the little outpost near to us. We ate *spaghetti* and other Italian dishes at his festive board, drank golden *vino di Capri*, smoked Toscana cigars, and sipped his Marsala. Afterwards he told us of his home at Caserta, and showed us photographs of towns in Tripoli that we knew only as names on the map. It was the day that news of the Italian reverse near Tolmino had just arrived. We knew that the little town of Udine had just fallen into enemy hands, and compared our recollections of its beautiful buildings and surroundings.

Then we wandered over the desert to see the site of the former Senussi ammunition-dump and workshops—now a heap of ashes and scrap-iron—and a wonderful rock cistern, Bir Uar. These great artificial caverns, excavated in the solid rock, are very plentiful all over this part of Libya, but Bir Uar is by far the largest I have seen. It is some 150 feet long and 15 feet high. The roof, or lid, is of solid rock, a yard or so in thickness, with only one pillar of rock in the centre left to support it. There are three

small apertures in the "roof," through one of which we descended by means of an iron ladder. The cement on the walls has become defective, and the cistern is thus no longer effective. But Bir Uar is interesting as one of the very few relics remaining to us of a period when Libya was apparently a flourishing colony, for according to Maspero these rock-cisterns in Marmarika may mostly be dated between the second and fourth centuries of our era.

Life on this coast, as I saw it, was very peaceful, but we were constantly reminded of the tragedies that happened almost every day, not always very far away, on the placid waters of the blue Mediterranean. For every sort of wreckage was washed up on the rocks—a companion-ladder, a teak cabin-door, some carved mahogany ornament from a saloon, life-belts, rafts, planks, wireless instruments, cases of tea, every sort of ship's stores, occasionally corpses. And sometimes the sound of distant gunfire was heard far out at sea.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OASIS OF SIWA

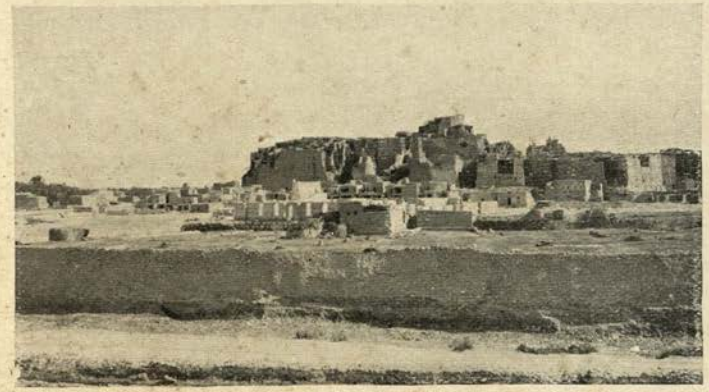
AMONG the remote places of the earth that have become familiar to British soldiers during the war, one of the most inaccessible is the Oasis of Siwa in the Libyan Desert. This isolation is not merely a matter of mileage, for it is only 200 miles from Mersa Matruh on the Libyan coast to the little town of Siwa itself, but that journey of 200 miles has to be performed over a waterless and stony waste. It is true that by approaching Siwa through Moghara or through the Baharia Oasis the distance between wells may be reduced. Nevertheless, the route from Matruh is the most practicable for modern travellers. A reference to Baedeker shows that in pre-war times the journey on camels took seven days from Matruh and seventeen or eighteen days from Cairo via Moghara. It follows that the number of tourists who far were almost entirely archæologists or explorers. The attractions of the oasis are undeniable, but they are chiefly of a nature visited Siwa was practically nil. The travellers who ventured so that appeals to a specialist. The discomforts of life in this outlandish place, as well as of the journey there, would outweigh the interest of antiquities or of scenery in the eyes of most people.

But just because the majority of those who braved the hardships of the road before the war were archæologists and explorers, they have produced a considerable bulk of literature on the oasis. The majority of these books, it need hardly be said, are German. The most convenient of all, for those people who have mastered the Teuton tongue is Dr. Georg Steindorff's "Durch die Libysche Wüste zur Amonsoase," published at Leipzig in 1904. For those who do not read German, the official Report on the Oasis of Siwa, by Captain Stanley, R.A.M.C., recently issued from the Government Press in Cairo, is the most useful. Both are well illustrated, especially the former.

The boom in visitors to Siwa seems to have begun in Napoleonic times. Previously the oasis had almost been cut off from the civilised world, but from the date when Browne penetrated into its solitude, at the end of the eighteenth century, an enterprising traveller has followed him every few years and recorded his impressions. Nowadays the *blasé* British Tommy has appeared among the primitive people, with his khaki shorts and his Woodbines, as little disturbed by the strangeness of his adventure as if he had taken a train from Greenwich to Peckham Rye.

For eighteen hundred years or so Siwa hardly figures in history at all. It was known to the Arabians in the thirteenth century. But its attractions may be divided into two definite categories—its history in the remote past and its picturesque appearance to-day. Herodotus mentions it on several occasions, referring in the first instance to the celebrated oracle of Jupiter Ammon:

> "The following tale is commonly told in Egypt concerning the oracle of Dodona in Greece, and that of Ammon in Libya. My informants on this point were the priests of Jupiter at Thebes. They said that two of the sacred women were once carried off from Thebes by the Phœnicians, and that the story went that one of them was sold into Libya and the other into Greece, and those women were the first founders of the oracles in the two countries. On my inquiring how they came to know so exactly what became of the two women, they answered 'that diligent search had been made after them at the time, but that it had not been found possible to discover where they were; afterwards, however, they received the information which they had given me.'
>
> "This was what I heard from the priests at Thebes; at Dodona, however, the women who deliver the oracles relate that matter as follows: 'Two black doves flew away from Egyptian Thebes, and while one directed its flight to Libya, the other came to them. . . . The dove which flew to Libya bade the Libyans to establish there an altar to Ammon.' This likewise is an oracle of Jupiter. The



EAST END OF TOWN OF SIWA.



NATIVE HOUSE AT SIWA.



WEST END OF TOWN OF SIWA.

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persons from whom I received these particulars were three priestesses of the Dodonæans, the eldest Promenaia, the next Timareté, and the youngest Timandra; what they said was confirmed by the other Dodonæans who dwell around the temple.

"My own opinion of these matters is as follows: I think that, if it be true that the Phœnicians carried off the holy women, and sold them for slaves, the one into Libya, and the other into Greece . . . this last must have been sold to the Thesprotians. . . . She also mentioned that her sister had been sold for a slave into Libya by the same persons as herself."

The next reference to Siwa in Herodotus is an account of Cambyses' unsuccessful expedition against the Ammonians in 525-521 B.C. After passing through Thebes (the modern Luxor), this large army completely disappeared in the desert beyond the Kharga Oasis. The passages describing this disaster are quoted in the next chapter.

In his Book IV. Herodotus gives some account of the Ammonians, the original inhabitants of the Siwa Oasis:

"Of these nations the first is that of the Ammonians who dwell at a distance of ten days' journey from Thebes, and have a temple derived from that of the Theban Jupiter. For at Thebes likewise, as I mentioned above, the image of Jupiter has a face like that of a ram. The Ammonians have another spring besides that which rises from the salt. The water of this spring is lukewarm at early dawn; at the time when the market fills it is much cooler; by noon it has grown quite cold; at this time, therefore, they water their gardens. As the afternoon advances the coldness goes off, till, about sunset, the water is once more lukewarm; still the heat increases, and at midnight it boils furiously. After this time it again begins to cool, and grows less and less hot till morning comes. This spring is called 'the Fountain of the Sun.'"

Alexander the Great, who took possession of Egypt in 332 B.C., visited the Siwa Oasis in the following year, in order to

consult the oracle, already famous in his day. An interesting account of the expedition is given in Plutarch's "Life of Alexander":

"The execution of the plan [of his new city of Alexandria] he left to his architects, and went to visit the temple of Jupiter Ammon. It was a long and laborious journey; and besides the fatigue, there were two great dangers attending it. The one was that their water might fail in a desert of many days' journey which afforded no supply; and the other that they might be surprised by a violent south wind amidst the wastes of sand, as it happened long before to the army of Cambyses. The wind raised the sand and rolled it in such waves that it devoured full fifty thousand men. These difficulties were considered and represented to Alexander; but it was not easy to divert him from any of his purposes. Fortune had supported him in such a manner that his resolutions were become invincibly strong; and his courage inspired him with such a spirit of adventure that he thought it not enough to be victorious in the field, but he must conquer both time and place.

"The divine assistances which Alexander experienced in his march met with more credit than the oracles delivered at the end of it, though those extraordinary assistances in some measure confirmed the oracles. In the first place, Jupiter sent such a copious and constant rain as not only delivered them from all fear of suffering by thirst, but, by moistening the sand and making it firm to the foot, made the air clear and fit for respiration. In the next place, when they found the marks which were to serve for guides to travellers removed or defaced, and in consequence wandered up and down without any certain route, a flock of crows made their appearance, and directed them in the way. When they marched briskly on, the crows flew with equal alacrity; when they lagged behind or halted, the crows also stopped. What is still stranger, Callisthenes avers, that at night, when they happened to be gone wrong, these birds called them by their croaking, and put them right again.

"When he had passed the desert, and was arrived at the

place, the minister of Ammon received him with salutations from the god, as from a father. And when he enquired whether any of the assassins of his father had escaped him, the priest desired he would not express himself in that manner, for his father was not a mortal. Then he asked whether all the murderers of Philip were punished, and whether it was given the proponent to be the conqueror of the world. Jupiter answered that he granted him that high distinction, and that the death of Philip was sufficiently avenged. Upon this Alexander made his acknowledgment to the god of rich offerings, and loaded the priests with presents of great value. This is the account most historians give us of the affair of the oracle; but Alexander himself, in the letter he wrote to his mother on that occasion, only says he received certain private answers from the oracle, which he would communicate to her, and her only, at his return.

"Some say Ammon's prophet, being desirous to address him in an obliging manner in Greek, intended to say, '*O Paidion*,' which signifies 'My son'; but in his barbarous pronunciation made the word end with an 's' instead of an 'n,' and so said '*O pai dios*,' which signifies 'O Son of Jupiter.' Alexander (they add) was delighted with the mistake in the pronunciation, and from that mistake was propagated a report that Jupiter himself had called him his son."

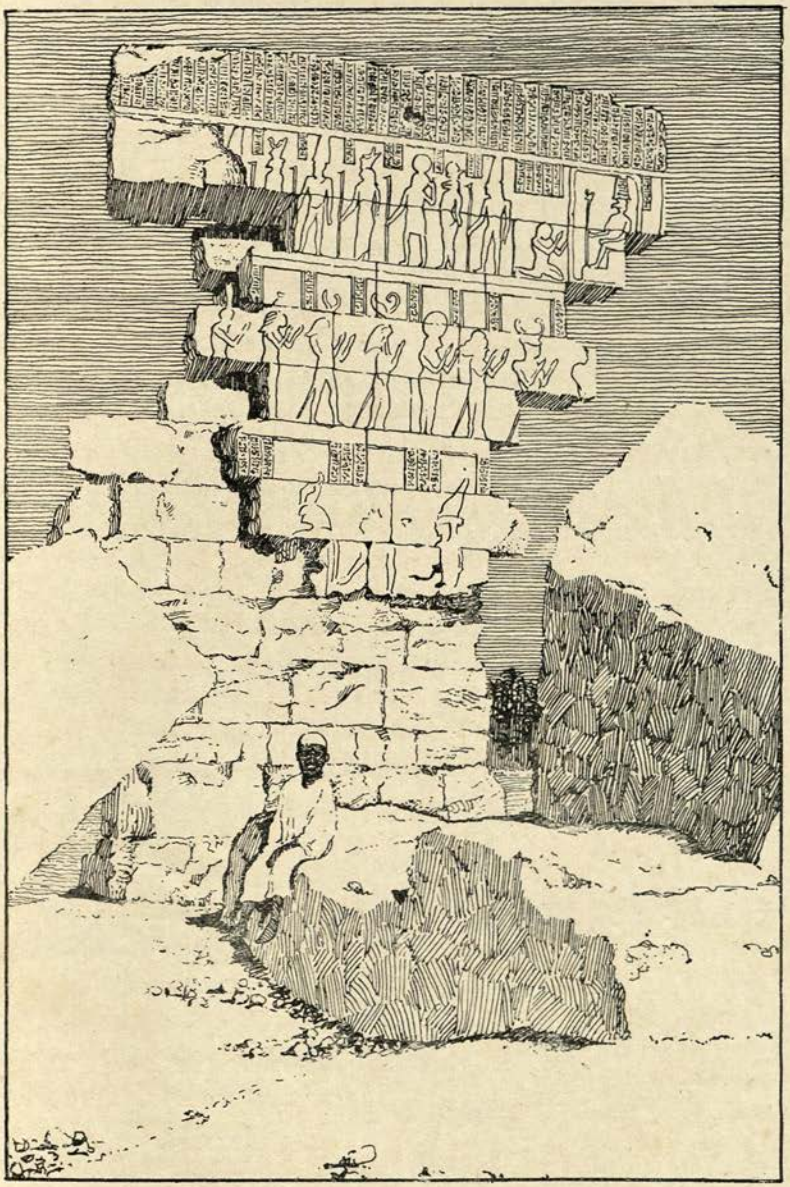
There has been much speculation as to the real objects of this romantic venture. A recent editor of Plutarch writes:

"Arrian tells us he took it in imitation of Perseus and Hercules, the former of whom had consulted that oracle, when he was despatched against the Gorgons; and the latter twice—viz., when he went into Libya against Antæus and when he marched into Egypt against Busiris. Now, as Perseus and Hercules gave themselves out to be the sons of the Grecian Jupiter, so Alexander had a mind to take Jupiter Ammon for his father. Maximus Tyrius informs us that he went to discover the fountains of the Nile; and Justin

says the intention of this visit was to clear up his mother's character, and to get himself the reputation of a divine origin."

Alexander had previously marched via Pelusium into Egypt, protected by his fleet on his right flank. He passed through Heliopolis, and then continued his journey to Memphis. Here he left the main body of his army in winter quarters. The force accompanying him on his advance from Memphis to Alexandria is thought to have amounted to 4,000 or 5,000 men. He was welcomed throughout Egypt as a deliverer from the Persian tyranny, and added that great area to his empire without striking a blow. From Alexandria, one gathers from other ancient historians, he marched along the Libyan coast, over the road described in the last chapter, for nearly 200 miles to Parætonium (Mersa Matruh). This place was on the frontier of the territory of Cyrene, a large Greek city 400 miles farther west. Here he was met by an embassy from Cyrene, bringing presents, and here he turned aside from the coast road for his march over the desert to Siwa. Arrian in his account says that there were "no landmarks along the road, nor mountains anywhere, nor any trees, nor any elevation of any sort by which a traveller might shape his course." This description is as true of the journey to-day, when our rattling Fords tear over the same road, as when Alexander traversed it twenty-two centuries ago. Even on modern maps the track is called the "Darb-es-Sultani" (the "Emperor's Road"), and by "The Emperor" is meant no other than Alexander himself.

The hardships of the march, noteworthy even to such daring adventurers as Alexander and his soldiers, may well have been magnified into miracles by fulsome annalists. Plutarch's account of his interviews with the oracle is supported by other writers. Modern historians seem to doubt Plutarch's theory that the expedition had a political object, and Grote—among others—regards it simply as an act of "genuine faith, a simple exaggeration of that exorbitant vanity which from the beginning reigned so largely in his bosom." It was customary for the Pharaohs on their accession to present themselves at the temple of Ammon-Ra. Alexander was now a Pharaoh, and



RUINS OF TEMPLE AT AGHURMI.

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chose to visit Siwa rather than Thebes, perhaps because his ancestor Hercules had done the same. It appears that after his visit he returned to the Delta by the route through Moghara and Wadi Natrun, not by Parætonium. In A.D. 160 the Greek traveller Pausanias visited the oasis.

Siwa, as Alexander knew it, must have been more populous than it is to-day, though it is difficult to see how its natural features can have altered very much since his time. The soil is still impregnated with salt, as Herodotus describes it, and this salt was used both for religious purposes and at the tables of the Persian Kings. The "Fountain of the Sun" still exists. The principal remains of ancient date in the oasis are the ruins of a temple in the small town of Aghurmi, the ruins of another temple at Ummebeda or Birbe, a mile or so south of Aghurmi, and the rock-tombs in the hill of Garet-el-Musabberin, close to the town of Siwa.

The temple inside Aghurmi is commemorated by two typical Egyptian doorways and a large piece of walling which is built into the steep natural rock-face of the town. These fragments are said by Steindorff to represent the "Temple of the Oracle," and to date from the reign of King Hakor, in the twenty-ninth Dynasty (398-379 B.C.), only fifty years or so before the date of Alexander's visit.

The same date is given for the "Temple of Ammon" at Ummebeda, of which the principal remaining fragment is shown in my sketch. This building existed in a fair state of preservation up to twenty or thirty years ago. Then it was literally blown to bits by the Turks in order to obtain stone for the new *Markaz* (Government offices) at Siwa. This violent course was necessary on account of the cyclopean nature of the blocks of stone. Their size may be estimated from some of the great monoliths still remaining, which measure a yard square and from thirty to thirty-five feet long. The material is coarse sandstone, said to be obtained from quarries two miles away. On these monoliths are carved various winged emblems and other subjects in bas-relief. The portion of the main wall still standing is similarly carved with figures and cartouches. Colour was plainly visible on the walls only a few years ago.

It may be assumed that this was the temple where the god

Ammon-Ra, was worshipped in Alexander's days. He was sometimes associated with the ram and sometimes with the goose.

We thus add to the menagerie of sacred animals already mentioned in this book—cats at Bubastis, crocodiles at Fayyum, and bulls at Memphis—associated with the various deities in Egyptian religion. The chief centre of Ammon-worship was Karnak, near Luxor, and as the district of Thebes, in which Karnak lies, gradually became the most important centre in Egypt, the high-priest of Ammon there became closely connected with the Kings of Egypt. Ra was the Sun-god, and when Ammon came to be combined with Ra, he was known as "king of the gods" and "lord of the thrones of the world." The Queens of Egypt became the high-priestesses of Ammon-Ra. The secondary seat of Ammon-worship, at Siwa, also came to have considerable importance. When Alexander visited the place, eighty priests officiated there. He intended to be buried there himself, but his funeral party only reached Memphis, whence his body was moved by Ptolemy Philopator to Alexandria.

Close to the town of Siwa is a rocky hill, honeycombed with ancient tombs, and known as Garet-el-Musabberin. Its colour appears golden in sunlight, especially towards sunset, and it rises from the level floor of the oasis, surrounded by forests of date-palms. All these tombs are hewn out of the solid rock. Most of them consist of a central chamber, or a succession of chambers, with smaller *loculi* or recesses for the reception of mummies. The whole hillside is littered with little white bones. Many of the chambers are decorated with frescoes and hieroglyphics, for the most part in reddish-brown monochrome. One of these, known locally as the "Tomb of Artaxerxes," had only just been opened, and one broiling summer afternoon I crawled in there to make a drawing of part of the decorations. Many inscriptions from these tombs have been published by Steindorff and by Bates.

There are other minor relics of the past in the oasis, but enough has now been said to recall the position of Siwa and its temples in ancient days.

The oasis itself is full of interest to the traveller. It lies in the heart of the Libyan Desert, about 78 feet below sea-level and

far below the level of the rocky plateau, the great cliffs of which surround it on the north. On the south the yellow sands of the Sahara are visible, stretching away for hundreds of miles towards the tropical interior of Africa. The cultivated portion of the oasis is small, according to some writers only two square miles. Fifty years ago the number of date-palms, on which a sort of capitation-tax is levied by the Government, was returned as 89,000, but the number has greatly increased since. It is difficult for a European to realise the importance of the date-palm to the natives. Apart from the obvious export value of the fruit in the markets of Alexandria and Cairo, it forms a staple food for the people. Date-stones are pressed to make oil and other preparations; the trunks of the trees are used for roofing all their houses. From the leaves are made the mats on which they lie; the stems of the leaves are fashioned into crates and bedsteads, known all over Egypt as *affass* work. From the leaves, too, are made the famous Siwan baskets, used for all purposes by the natives and offered to travellers as a ceremonial gift. Even a fermented wine is made from the dates. Figs, oranges, apricots, olives, and African vines, also flourish in the oasis.

The fauna of Siwa does not greatly differ from that of the surrounding desert. Mosquitoes and sand-flies are a scourge, owing to the large areas of stagnant water among the palm-groves and the salt marshes. But there are wonderful springs of fresh water, that are perhaps the chief attraction of the neighbourhood. Of these the most famous are "Moses' Well," now identified with Ain Hamman near Aghurmi, and the "Fountain of the Sun," also sometimes identified with the Ain Hamman.

The people of Siwa are a somewhat mixed race, numbering some 4,000 in all. Herr Falls says they are "of negro blood crossed with the light-coloured ancient Libyan race." They have a language of their own, though most of them understand Arabic too. In his official Report on the Oasis, Captain Stanley gives a Siwan vocabulary and the elements of Siwan grammar. Slavery prevailed here up to fairly recent times, and is still in vogue at the neighbouring oasis of Jarabub on the frontier, where no Europeans are allowed to go for fear of rousing religious fanaticism, as Jarabub is a sacred city like Lhassa. Until our troops took possession of Siwa early in 1917, the Senussi held

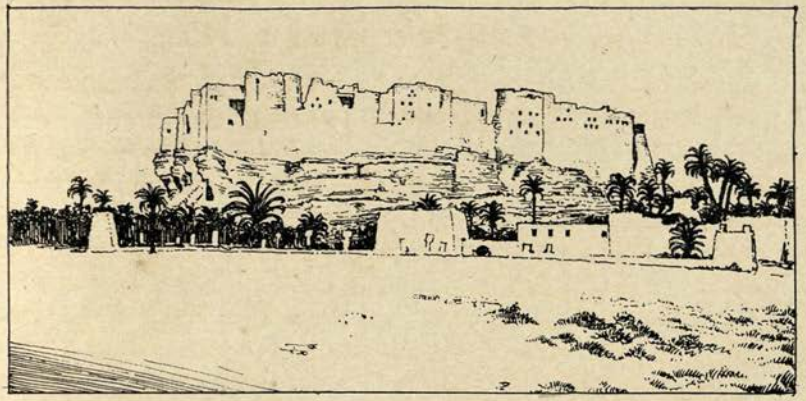
the place, using its great palm-groves as a base for supplies, and terrorising the peaceable inhabitants.

Most of the people live in the two fortress-like little towns of Siwa and Aghurmi, which rise from the level plain only two miles apart. When the hot weather comes, the wealthier inhabitants leave their mud dwellings on the low-lying windless plain and live on the slopes of the surrounding escarpment. One favourite place for this *villeggiatura* is the cemetery hill already described, the Garet-el-Musabberin.

The donkeys of Siwa are celebrated, and are capable of crossing the 200 miles of stony desert to Matruh in a week, though their hoofs are often in a lamentable condition on arrival. Camels, on the other hand, fare badly in the oasis, for the deadly Jaffar fly abounds there.

The houses are almost all very dark, but are usually fairly clean when occupied by better-class people. The furniture of the rooms is wonderfully simple—a carpet and perhaps a couple of native mats to sit on, one or two painted wooden chests, and a few of the locally-made coloured baskets, a platter, and the apparatus for making tea. Tea is a great institution among these Libyan tribes. It is drunk at all hours and on all ceremonial occasions. The outfit consists of a "tea-caddy" of wood or tin, usually kept locked, in which are three compartments. One contains tea, the second loaf-sugar with a hammer for breaking it, and the third is supposed to contain mint, but that fragrant herb is generally freshly plucked. Mint is added to the third "cup" of tea, though the cup consists of a very small tumbler of coarse glass, about the same size as a liqueur glass. The majority of the tea-pots are said to be imported from the Italian seaport of Benghazi, but no doubt their real place of origin is either Germany or Austria.

Something may be seen of the inhabitants and their ways in the date-market of Siwa, or in the large open space where baskets and other simple necessaries are offered for sale. Captain Stanley describes the appearance and dress of the natives of both sexes, but there is nothing very remarkable in their characteristics. Silver ornaments are worn by all the women, and are frequently coveted by the numerous British officers whose duties have suddenly involved a visit to this remote desert spot. The



GENERAL VIEW OF AGHURMI, SIWA OASIS.



THE MARKET-PLACE IN THE TOWN OF SIWA.



THE "HILL OF TOMBS," SIWA.

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method of purchase is simple. The British son of Mars indicates the shy maiden whose ankles he proposes to divest of their metal fittings. She, or more probably her lord and master, removes them and places them on a pair of scales. The resident officer of the Egyptian Government acts as referee, and the owner of the bracelet or anklet charges the purchaser the cost of silver by weight, plus a small extra for the workmanship, increased proportionately according to the elaborateness or antiquity of the ornament. Quite a large amount of Siwan bracelets must now be adorning the chaste wrists of young wives in London suburbs, or the more blatant limbs of the beauty chorus in theatre-land. Siwan baskets, too, must have been exported in considerable bulk to England, for every driver of a Ford car down to the oasis seems to return to camp with a few samples of different sizes and shapes.

Two interesting passages in Captain Stanley's book describe the peculiar music of the natives and their ceremonies at the feast of Yom Ashura:

> "Some of the songs they sing in the fields are quite tuneful, and may be heard for great distances in the still atmosphere. They somewhat resemble the chants in church music. Their musical instruments are drums, a stringed instrument, the zamorra and castanets. They also have a flute made out of old gun-barrels, which plays very sweet music. A peculiarity of Siwan music is that they can translate speech into music, the various notes and cadences having definite meanings, so that on special occasions the music is always extempore, and is understood by the audience just as a speech would be. . . ."
>
> ". . . The prettiest ceremony is during the feast of Yom Ashura. For several days then the roofs of the houses are decorated with huge palm-fronds 18 to 20 feet in length, to which are attached torches soaked in oil. After sunset these are all lit up, and for several hours the old town and the new are a blaze of illumination. The children of both sexes sing from the roofs far into the night the monotonous but sweet refrain: '*Eedi, Eedi, ya hamudi, Fok Djiridi.*' It is customary for friends to exchange at this season what are

almost exactly like our Christmas-trees. They differ for boys and girls. The girls' tree, called the *busbasa* (window), is a square framework of palm-branch erected on a stout pole in a horizontal position. To the corners and along the four sides are fixed torches, and the framework is hung with presents of fruit, mint, sweets, or pigeons. The boys' tree, the *zarabya*, is decorated in the same way, but the framework is in the shape of a cross. Both have patterns worked on them by stripping the bark and staining the exposed surface with *inab-el-dyb*, or pomegranate juice."

Very different from these charming ceremonies is the same writer's description of Siwan morals. He regards the natives as untruthful, lazy, ignorant, fickle, and almost without any regard for the ordinary obligations of marriage. It is doubtful whether an exception to this generalisation is provided by the system of labelling virgins with a large silver medal which I am informed prevails in the oasis. This may imply that virgins are very much honoured or very scarce. On the eve of her wedding, a girl is taken to the bathing-pool by her parents to be washed. While this process takes place, she throws her medal into the clear waters of the deep pool, but a small brother or other convenient urchin is at hand ready to dive after it and recover it—as I have seen boys recover stones in the same pool—before it reaches the bottom. No doubt the medal is utilised for making an anklet or bracelet for the damsel to wear after marriage.

When I heard that there were mosques in the town of Siwa, I imagined domes, minarets, inlaid pulpits, marble niches, and all the attributes of these wonderful buildings that constitute the chief charm of Cairo to an architect. But these mosques are merely spaces for prayer, distinguished from the mud huts surrounding them only by a funnel-like structure, the minaret, and by the odour of sanctity.

But it is perhaps most satisfactory to describe my impressions of my journey to Siwa, of the oasis and of the two little towns, in the words of the diary that I sent home at the time.

August 9, 1917.—". . . I have now reached Siwa Camp, after a very long day yesterday coming down here from

Matruh. I was up at 4 a.m., in order to start at schedule time from the headquarters of the Armoured Car Brigade in the village. The normal method of visiting Siwa is to go on one's knees to somebody at the local H.Q., tell a heartrending story of the urgency of one's mission, and produce written orders from the People of the Most Illustrious Standing. Then they graciously intimate that you may perch yourself on any projecting corner of the string of Ford cars that take the weekly rations and mails down to Siwa, a journey occupying a day and a half.

"But I knew those Fords—uncomfortable jumbles of scrap-iron without a hint of a seat—and dreamed of better things. Luck favoured me. I was quite aware that the more Important People whose duties called them to Siwa had contrived more satisfactory means of transport, and, as it happened, just about the time I was due to go there, an officer was sent down on a large 'Sunbeam' to see to some repairs to the cars stationed there. He proposed to do the whole journey of 200 miles odd in a day, and I was offered a seat in his car. The arrangement was considerably facilitated by omitting to ask permission from local H.Q., who might conceivably have ferreted out some objection to so eminently admirable a scheme. The driver of the car invited me to breakfast at some unearthly hour just after dawn, and after various delays we rolled out of Matruh about 6.30 a.m.

"The sun was up, of course, by this time, but not yet really powerful. A Ford car was with us, and kept up our pace without apparent difficulty. For the first few miles we were gradually rising over rolling country, broken up into deep *wadis* and covered pretty thickly with scrub. The sea was visible behind us for a long time until we crossed a high ridge. The road was stony and winding, but my companion settled down to a steady twenty miles an hour. After a time the scrub became scantier and scantier, until finally it vanished altogether. We were now at a considerable altitude above the sea. The road was only just visible, and we were racing over a vast level plain without any features whatever except stones and white snail-shells. You

should read that thrilling story 'In the Hands of the Senussi,' where you will see how civilised Englishmen were actually driven to subsist on these snails for days together; I don't think I have ever read a more terrible tale of privation. The white shells are everywhere all over this plateau, sometimes in heaps, and their sticky tracks were all glistening in the sun before the full heat of the day came. I cannot imagine what the snails live on, for in most of the places where they seemed most abundant on this long journey there was not a scrap of vegetation. Perhaps snails don't live on vegetation? Anyway, I should not care to live on snails, though N—— and I once ate them at the 'Petite Riches' in Soho.

"As the sun rose in the sky the glare became very trying, even with sun-goggles on, and every time we stopped the heat was terrific. Do you remember how I used to laugh at people who had seen mirages? Well, now I apologise humbly. By the middle of the morning the whole horizon was shimmering with mirage. There seemed to be meres or lagoons in front of us all the time, constantly changing their shapes and always vanishing as we approached. At midday we pulled up, and suddenly realised just what the temperature was, for there was practically no wind. The cars were drawn up abreast about 5 feet apart, and blankets were stretched over the space between to make a bit of shade. The men produced a 'Primus,' which is carried on each of these Ford patrol cars, and made us tea. We sat or reclined on the sand to eat and drink and smoke. It was almost too hot to talk, but my companion had recently returned from British East Africa, and was full of interesting things. How little we know of that strange campaign, and how little we are told!

"Soon after we resumed our journey, and met a Ford ambulance taking some patients up to the hospital tents at Matruh. Fancy evacuating your patients over 200 miles of desert before you reach a hospital, and even at Matruh there are only a few marquees. A little later we met the returning ration-convoy, such a long string of shabby little Fords. I forgot to mention that there is a group of wells, called Bir-el-Kanais, about 50 or 60 miles out from Matruh,

but there is nothing about it to describe, only a barbed wire fence and sand *ad lib.*

"We reached this little camp after dark. For the last half hour we had been ploughing through fairly heavy sand, and I think we had missed the track. It was about 7.30 p.m. when we arrived. We had actually been running about ten hours, and the distance is about 154 miles, a very creditable performance on such a 'road.'"

August 10.—". . . This small camp is the usual desert outpost, barbed wire, a few huts, and a few bell-tents—the acme of simplicity, ugliness, and monotony. It stands a little above the general level of its surroundings, and so commands a fairly extensive prospect of stones and sand. The oasis is not visible from here. I was quartered in the 'hospital,' a small hut rather bigger than our cycle-house at home. It has no windows, of course—huts in Egypt never have—and is made of wood covered with boarding up to a certain height and matting above; this keeps out most of the sun and lets in a fair amount of fresh air, but the heat here is tremendous. The 'hospital' consists of one bed, and that consists of a stretcher resting on two boxes, which is quite comfortable, as I know of old. But if anybody in the garrison goes sick, out I go into the M.O.'s tent. The M.O. said he could put me in his own tent if I didn't mind a squash, but that he had put his last visitor—who happened to be a General—in the hospital. I said that what was good enough for the General was good enough for me, and voted for the hut. The sick parade rolls up in the morning and sits on my bed. Most of the cases are septic sores and Number Nines. I clear out till it is over.

"They live fairly well in the mess, considering all things. I brought several tins and two bottles as my contribution. Whisky was what they really wanted, but the canteen at Matruh was sold out. Several of the officers in these armoured-car and patrol-car units were once in the cavalry, as Regulars, and I cannot make out whether their slang is derived from the stable or the garage. Certainly it is new to me. Instead of saying they are off for a run in the cars, they talk of 'going for a chuck around,' or announce that

they will 'peezle down to the oasis.' Every now and then somebody goes mad in the desert, so the little garrison is changed every month or two.

"This afternoon I got a lift in a car down to the oasis, about 10 or 12 miles away. The first few miles are over heavy sand; then one reaches the head of a sort of pass. The desert for some miles down to the oasis is rather like a switchback ride. It is a point of honour with every driver of a Ford car at Siwa to drive like mad through and over everything. We whirled round impossible corners on a road that was not a road, fell over small precipices, ran over boulders, and generally achieved the impossible. Suddenly the thing was stopped with a fearful jerk and a squeaking of machinery. Passengers were precipitated off their precarious perches on to the ground.

"This halt was a grudging concession to eccentrics who wished to admire the scenery. Rather less than a minute was allowed for photographers to take a series of views of the fine rocky cliffs around us. I did what I always do on such occasions, got flustered, and focussed my camera for a vertical instead of a horizontal view. Fortunately, I had just enough seconds remaining, before the whistle blew, to take another photograph of the same view. Then we tore blindly on. We reached the level of the oasis without casualties, and a few minutes later arrived at the *markaz*, or Government building, where we alighted and went to see the Governor of the district, a British subaltern of no great age disguised as a Major of the Egyptian Army. From the very first I felt conscious of the incongruity of our arrival in this way. As one descends into the oasis from the red-stone cliffs, it seems like a detached outpost of Central Africa rather than a portion of Egypt. It is a backwater, cut off from civilisation and the rest of the world by the great tract of desert round it. Camels are the only fit means of transport in such a place. They are quiet and dignified and slow. They merge into the primitive life of the market-place, with its white-robed men, its shrouded women, its donkeys and its dates. But our noisy cavalcade of Fords, hooting and rattling, belching out petrol fumes

and twentieth-century slang, clashed horribly with the atmosphere of Siwa. All my companions were in a breathless hurry, but they had nothing whatever to do.

"Among the party was another officer, a Captain in the A.S.C., and considerably my senior. He was a typical product of modern civilisation, a Londoner, nervy and impatient. After 'doing' Siwa town in a few minutes, including a quarrel with a local patriarch whom he asked to sell him a bracelet, he joined me for a visit to Aghurmi, the other little fortress town in the oasis, some two miles away. His eyes were glued to the second hand of his watch as we bumped in our car over little dykes between mosquito-infested pools. He was disappointed with Aghurmi for some obscure reason — why, I can't think. It seemed to me a wonderful little place—a great mass of stone rising up out of the marshy plain, resembling on a small scale one of those little mountain towns one sees in Umbria and the Abruzzi, in the way that the houses seemed to grow out of the natural rocks below them. We entered it through a sort of postern, at the top of a steep slope. There was no other entrance. Once inside the place, the tall buildings surrounded one on all sides, like a block of flats round a central well. There was one curious structure I could not account for, a tapering round tower of rough stone. This was the minaret of the mosque! While my companion fumed over the lack of something or other, and loudly deplored the time 'wasted' in coming here, a courteous old Sheikh greeted us and invited us to see his garden.

"We passed out of the town gate, and, after walking a little way through a grove of palms, arrived at a wooden gate in a mud wall. Our host then admitted us to his slice of Tropical Africa, one of the most beautiful places imaginable, or so it seemed to a stranger. In a sort of arbour he spread out a fine carpet for himself, and placed (modern European) chairs opposite for us two officers. It was only then that the awful truth dawned on my companion's mind: we were in for a tea-party! In a frenzied whisper he asked me if I thought we could escape, even at this eleventh hour. I am afraid I was intentionally pessi-

mistic to him. I scored by knowing about three words of Arabic, whereas, I think, he knew only one. Meanwhile the old man, ignorant of a single word of English, beamed on us and made preparations for the ceremony. He sent off various minions for water, fuel, and the accessories of the feast. After an hour or so of leisured toil, tea was served. By this time my companion was on the verge of apoplexy. Once he had got up, very rudely, and rushed off to see if the Ford (which the Siwans called the 'tramway') was still at the garden gate. The time of waiting had been beguiled by eating dates, grapes, and figs—freshly plucked in the garden.

"Tea in the Siwa Oasis is quite a ritual. The Sheikh asked us which of two kinds we would have. I tried to say 'Either' and said 'Both'! This was a *faux pas* due to ignorance of Arabic. The first pot was poured away. The second pot was poured into little glasses for us to drink. It was very sweet, and served without milk. The second pot was even sweeter, and our cups were filled again. For the third round freshly gathered mint was used in the pot, and you may be surprised to hear that I found it excellent.

"I just succeeded in restraining my companion from escaping after the second cup, as he proposed to do. On our departure, the old man presented us each with a Siwan ornamental basket full of fruit, and I was hoping to send you this as a souvenir, but the A.S.C. Captain is, I am told, a collector in private life, and he succeeded in collecting both the baskets when he left Siwa to-day. I took a photo of the old Sheikh in his garden, but the atmosphere was so electric that I misfocussed it again, and the result will be a dud."

August 11.—"I have had a delightful time in the oasis to-day, and I wish I could describe the town of Siwa to you; but it is difficult to do so, because it is so unlike any other town I have ever seen. Its general appearance is that of a long fortress. One end of it consists of a great sandstone rock, which slopes downwards towards the other end. The houses at this lower end, where the natural rock has reached ground-level, rise sheer for eight or ten storeys in height. At this end it is a cross between a mud honeycomb and a

block of flats. The only materials used in this extraordinary structure appear to be mud and palm-trunks, and the result is certainly more like a honeycomb than anything else I can suggest. It is said that when the head of a family dies in a Siwan house, that house is accursed if his family continue to live in it. So they simply build another flat on the top of it. You may well ask how the staircase problem is solved; indeed, that is a very sound question. It is solved chiefly by avoiding staircases altogether. The alternative is not, as you might expect, an electric lift, but a sort of sloping burrow starting from the ground and twisting upwards like a worm-hole in an apple. These passages are very steep and quite free from light. One gropes one's way upwards. On the tenth storey or so was a blind man. I can't imagine how he ever got up there or how he would ever get down. The mud walls of the flats on the top storey are only about 6 inches thick, and the whole structure looks very crazy. I believe the inhabitants flit from one side of the place to the other in the winter, carrying the roofs under their arms, I suppose. Some of the houses outside this citadel town have their sides slightly tapered upwards—"battered" we architects call it; I have never seen this before except in ancient Egyptian temples. By the way, that A.S.C. man I spoke of in connection with my visit to Aghurmi nearly caused a riot to-day. He was just plunging into a house where some native women were, to buy bracelets, I suppose, when the father of the family came round the corner. I just stopped my friend in time to avoid a death in his family. . . ."

August 14.—"To-day, my last day at Siwa, has been the most interesting of all. I got down to the oasis early in the morning, riding one of the 'box-Fords' that carries *fantasses* to be filled with water from wells in the oasis, and went to see the Governor at the *Markaz*. Hearing that I wanted to go to Aghurmi to sketch, he sent with me a *gafir*, or native policeman. We walked to the old Temple of Ammon, some three miles away, and, after taking a photograph of the view from the ruins, I sat down to sketch the principal remaining fragment. About 11.30 I was surprised to see my old friend the Sheikh of Aghurmi ride up on a white donkey. He

intimated that my company was desired at luncheon in his house! With just a little misgiving, I accepted. The policeman knew no English. We went through the postern of the village and climbed up one of those burrows, such as I described in the town of Siwa, to the top. It debouched on a kind of landing, from which several rooms opened. One was a kitchen; another probably the *harem;* the third—into which he led me, a bed-sitting room—at least, his brass European bedstead, with mosquito-curtains, was at one end. The furniture consisted of one or two painted chests and a very handsome carpet, on which we sat. I was requested to remove my puttees, socks and boots, and did so. The flies were awful.

"Lunch was served about half an hour after our arrival. A low round deal table, about a yard across and a foot above the ground, was placed between us. I had an Arabic phrase-book on the floor on my left. At intervals I brazenly ejaculated polite phrases, as recommended for use in similar emergencies, such as 'You have honoured me'; 'May God grant you pleasure'; and so on. The *plat du jour* consisted of a tureen with several lumps of roast lamb floating in gravy; with this was served a *purée* of spinach, and a dish of some other vegetable in slices. Between us were large round oat-cakes, not crisp, but what Yorkshire people call 'sad.' I was allowed to use my penknife, being a European, and a spoon was also provided to meet my case. My host used his fingers, but was very dexterous with his oat-cake, dipping it into the spinach. It sounds rather disgusting, but was much less so than you might imagine, and a brass ewer and basin for washing one's hands was provided—also finger-bowls of a sort. The food was quite well cooked.

"Several sorts of fruit from the old man's garden followed, then tea. He next offered me ration cigarettes, obtained somehow from our camp twelve miles away. As a final mark of hospitality he produced some 'Number Nines,' wrapped in a bit of paper. I was politely declining them, when I was startled to see what seemed to be C——'s writing on the paper. Yes, it was; and the word 'Cambridge' was quite distinct. Now, how was it that I was being offered



POOL AT SIWA.



VIEW IN SIWA OASIS.

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pills after lunch in a letter written to me a month before by my own wife? It seemed uncanny, but at last I solved the mystery. I was living in the hospital, had torn up this letter and thrown it away. The old Sheikh had persuaded a native working at the camp to get some 'Number Nines.' The hospital orderly had looked for a bit of paper, seen these scraps of my letter, and wrapped up the pills for the Sheikh in one of them. But the long arm of coincidence stretched farther than usual that time!"

"After lunch the Sheikh asked me what I would like to do. I suggested a bath in 'Moses' Well.' He ordered his white donkey to be saddled and a black one for me, but when they arrived insisted on my using his own mount. The policeman had stood at attention opposite me throughout the meal, except when he was invited to have a bite of the dainties after us, and he now followed us through a jungle of dwarf-palms and stagnant pools full of mosquitoes to the bathing-pool, known as Ain-el-Hamman. This magnificent well is surrounded by palms and lined with Roman masonry. It must be 60 or 80 feet across, and is very deep. Bubbles pour up to the surface from the bottom. It is amazingly clear, and the water has a curious brilliance about it. The Sheikh plunged in with me, and swam quite well. So did the policeman, on being given permission to disrobe. A rapid stream of water, of some size, runs from this wonderful spring over the oasis. We returned on donkeys to Aghurmi, and I was sent away with a gift of a very large basket filled with grapes. This is being sent home to you as a memento of my week at Siwa."

The return to Matruh was begun the following day on a Ford car with the ration-convoy. We travelled much more slowly than on the outward trip in the "Sunbeam," and bivouacked at night on a salt flat, but the discomforts of the journey were well worth undertaking to see this very interesting and very inaccessible corner of Africa.

CHAPTER IX

THE OASES OF KHARGA AND BAHARIA

THE previous chapter told of the most northerly of the line of oases that stretches across the Libyan Desert between the Mediterranean and the frontier of the Soudan. In the present chapter the two most accessible of the others are to be briefly described.

A tourist visiting Egypt in normal times seldom includes a trip over the desert to Kharga and Baharia in his programme, though Baedeker suggests a visit of three or four days to the former oasis in his itinerary for a traveller spending four or five weeks in Egypt. They cannot, however, be regarded as serious rivals to the more familiar haunts of tourists on the Nile. This is partly due to the lack of architectural remains—temples or mosques—partly to the lack of accommodation for visitors, but chiefly to the real difficulty of reaching them from Egypt proper. Ten years ago, however, this difficulty was removed, in the case of Kharga, by the Western Oases Railway; and since the war began our army has brought Baharia rather nearer to the whirl of civilisation and its attendant blessings.

The Egyptian Government has published a series of Reports on the oases of Kharga, Baharia, Dakla, and Farafra, during the last twenty years. These deal primarily with geology and water-supply, but contain a good deal of interesting information as to the natives and some references to the scanty relics of antiquity. An attempt had been made before the war to divert to Kharga some of the stream of tourists on its way to Luxor and Assuan, but it was not altogether a success. The average millionaire and his lady who loll on the decks of *dahabiyehs* on the Nile are not likely to be attracted by the prospect of a small hotel in a remote oasis, far from the madding crowd they love, separated from it by a hundred miles of sand, alone with Nature and a Persian temple. Kharga is rather a place for plain living and high thinking, Baharia still more so.

To enjoy these oases one should avoid the hottest months of summer, and be prepared for a rest. Then, to those who love great open spaces, wide vistas of rocky cliffs and palm-studded plain—life in its lowest terms—there is a certain charm even in these depressions in the Libyan Desert. The planets seem to shine with unusual brightness, and the moonlight nights are magnificent. In the oases, too, one can watch a sunset and afterglow that is even more marvellous than on the desert or the Nile.

But soldiers, who have marched into such places with all their belongings on their backs, who have had to endure the blazing heat of a whole summer, and who have had to be content with the minimum of comforts and recreation, can hardly take the same point of view as the tourist or the present writer. One visit to the Temple of Darius is scanty compensation for months of burning sand and biting mosquitoes, and it is difficult to raise much enthusiasm for sunsets or moonlights after the average Tommy has finished his working day. But the Y.M.C.A. has done excellent service in some of these lonely stations, and one of its workers has produced a little pamphlet on Kharga that must have interested many relays of troops who were exiled there.

My own visits to these western oases occurred after the Senussi campaign was over, when all serious danger of a sudden descent from the interior of the Libyan Desert to the Nile Valley had ceased to exist. Conditions were not precisely similar to those obtaining before the war, but travelling had become comfortable, comparatively speaking, and life in the various camps involved none of the hardships that prevailed in earlier days. In the summer one could avoid the heat of noon by retiring to huts of matting or to cool buildings; in the cold nights of winter there was always a roof over one's head.

The journey from civilisation to Kharga begins at the little station of Oasis Junction, more than 300 miles from Cairo, and in the irrigated valley of the Nile. A train runs from here to Kharga twice a week in connection with the night express from Cairo, leaving the junction very early in the morning. After a quarter of an hour's journey, one reaches Gara, where are the engine-sheds and rest-houses of the Western Oases Railway. Breakfast can be obtained at one of these houses. The little settlement lies on the edge of the desert. The houses are white, with

verandahs of green painted woodwork. The British engineer of the railway and his wife are the only resident Europeans. A couple of squalid native villages are in the neighbourhood of the station.

For a hundred miles the railway crosses the desert, near the old caravan track that has been traversed by camels for centuries. The scenery, as one ascends the rocky Wadi Samhud, is very striking. At the head of this *wadi* the line emerges on the level Libyan plateau. All through the summer months, and even to some extent in the winter, the glare on this journey is trying. But the railway-carriages are designed to mitigate this as far as possible. The roof is double, and has deep "eaves" overhanging the upper part of the windows. The windows, too, are double, the glazed portion being tinted a dull blue, with a second window formed of wire gauze outside it. There are no fixed seats in the first-class saloon, basket chairs being provided instead. The journey from Gara to Sherika, the principal camp and formerly the headquarters of the Western Oases Corporation, occupies some six hours, as a rule, though the distance is only 108 miles. The gradients at either end, up to the plateau and down to the oasis, are steep. Crossing the plateau, especially if the usual violent wind is blowing from the north, dust pours into the carriages, unless all the double windows are closed and all fresh air excluded. The descent from the barren plateau, devoid of a blade of vegetation or a single distinctive feature, to the oasis affords a fine panorama of romantic rock scenery, full of lonely grandeur. At the foot of this valley one reaches the level of the oasis, which various authorities have estimated differently, modern explorers stating it to be from 200 to 300 feet above the sea.

The Oasis of Kharga is about 115 miles long and from 12 to 50 miles wide. It is thus very much larger than Siwa or Baharia. It was known to the Egyptians as the Southern Oasis and to the Greeks as the Great Oasis It lay on the ancient *Darb-el-Arba'in* or "Forty Days Road," from Egypt to the Soudan, and thus formed part of a highway known to travellers thousands of years ago. It was inhabited in very early times, as is proved by the finding of flint spear-heads and arrow-heads. It is mentioned, with the other oases, in inscriptions of early dynasties, and seems to have been a centre of trade in dates and wines.

But it first appears prominently in history during the reign of Cambyses, the Persian King who conquered Egypt in the sixth century B.C. In the last chapter it was mentioned that this ambitious monarch wished to add the Oasis of Siwa to his already extensive dominions. The following extract from Herodotus (III. 17-26) describes the venture, and its disastrous end in the desert between Kharga and Siwa.

> "After this Cambyses took counsel with himself, and planned three expeditions. One was against the Carthaginians, another against the Ammonians. . . . He judged it best to despatch his fleet against Carthage, and to send some portion of his land army to act against the Ammonians. . . .
>
> "At Thebes, which he passed through on his way, he detached from his main body some 50,000 men, and sent them against the Ammonians, with orders to carry the people into captivity and burn the oracle of Jupiter. . . .
>
> "The men sent to attack the Ammonians started from Thebes, having guides with them, and may be clearly traced as far as the city Oasis, which is inhabited by Samians, said to be of the tribe Æschrionia. The place is distant from Thebes seven days journey across the sand, and is called in our tongue 'the island of the blessed.' Thus far the army is known to have made its way; but thenceforth nothing is to be heard of them, except what the Ammonians, and those who get their knowledge from them, report. It is certain they neither reached the Ammonians, nor even came back to Egypt. Farther than this, the Ammonians relate as follows: That the Persians set forth from the oasis across the sand, and had reached about halfway between that place and themselves, when, as they were at their midday meal, a wind arose from the south, strong and deadly, bringing with it vast columns of whirling sand, which entirely covered up the troops and caused them wholly to disappear. Thus, according to the Ammonians, did it fare with the army."

Commentators consider that by "the city Oasis" Herodotus can only have meant Kharga, which is about seven days' journey from Luxor (Thebes).

Cambyses was succeeded by Darius I., who is commemorated in Egypt chiefly by the fine temple to Ammon which he built at Hibis, near Nadura, a few miles from the village of Kharga. It is the only temple of this period still remaining in Egypt, and a further description of it appears later in this chapter. It was enlarged by Darius II. and restored by Nektanebes early in the fourth century B.C. With this exception, history has little to tell us of Kharga during many centuries of Persian, Egyptian, Greek, and Ptolemaic dominion, until the Romans came. Then much building and engineering work was carried out, of which considerable remains still exist to-day.

The chief object of the Romans appears to have been to provide measures for defence and for irrigation. They established various forts on the principal trade-routes across the oasis. Of these the most important is at El Deris, at the foot of the prominent hill of Gebel Ghennima, and about six miles east of the present camp at Sherika, from which it is visible. It is built in the form of a square, with lofty walls of mud brick. There is a well within the fort, used for irrigating a cultivated area for the garrison as well as for supplying them with water.

The Roman irrigation works show great engineering skill, and must have entailed the employment of an enormous amount of labour. The numerous wells, like those at Siwa, are still in use in many cases. But even more remarkable are various underground aqueducts in the northern part of the oasis. These wonderful tunnels are driven into solid rock to water-bearing strata. One has been found to be three miles long. Each of the four shafts at Umm-el-Dabadib has, on an average, 150 vertical shafts communicating with the surface, the depth of these in some cases being 175 feet. Water obtained from some of these ancient tunnels had a temperature of 87° Fahrenheit. The woodwork, often of palm-trunks, used for lining the sides of some of the Roman wells, is still sometimes seen in good condition. Other wells were lined with stone.

Another building that is attributed to the Roman period is a small but now dilapidated temple at Nadura, not far from Darius' temple at Hibis. It is believed to have been erected about 140 A.D. by Antoninus Pius, and to have been the place of exile of Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, in the fifth century

A.D. Gibbon relates the story of his banishment thus ("Decline and Fall," chap. xlvii):

> ". . . After a residence at Antioch of a few years, the hand of Theodosius subscribed an edict which ranked him [Nestorius] with Simon the Magician, proscribed his opinions and followers, condemned his writings to the flames, and banished his person, first to Petra in Arabia, and at length to Oasis, one of the *islands* of the Libyan Desert. Secluded from the Church and from the world, the exile was still pursued by the rage of bigotry and war. A wandering tribe of the Blemmyes or Nubians invaded his solitary prison; in their retreat they dismissed a crowd of useless captives; but no sooner had Nestorius reached the banks of the Nile than he would gladly have escaped from a Roman and orthodox city to the milder servitude of the savages. His flight was punished as a new crime. . . ."

Gibbon adds a footnote—not one of his famous sniggers at some *risqué* passage, but a very typical example of his phrasing, and interesting here as giving his definition of an oasis:

> "The metaphor of *islands* is applied by the grave civilians to those happy spots which are discriminated by water and verdure from the Libyan sands. Three of these exist under the common name of oasis or *alvahat*—(1) The temple of Jupiter Ammon; (2) the Middle Oasis, three days' journey to the west of Lycopolis; (3) the Southern, where Nestorius was banished, in the first climate, and only three days' journey from the confines of Nubia."

By these three names Gibbon obviously intends to describe the three oases of Siwa, Baharia, and Kharga respectively. The remarkable Christian necropolis at El Bagawat, or Ai Baguat, is of approximately the same date as the banishment of Nestorius, and confirms the opinion now generally held by historians that theseWestern Oases, and especially the Oasis of Kharga, attained their maximum prosperity in the Roman period, between the beginning of the Christian era—or a little earlier—and the beginning of the seventh century A.D. When these tombs at El Bagawat were built there must have been a great number of prosperous

families in the oasis, but after the Arab conquest a period of decline ensued and the population steadily dwindled.

From this date for a thousand years nothing is known concerning Kharga or the other oases. The first traveller who ventured into them after this long interval appears to have been one Poncet, who visited Kharga in 1698. The story of his travels was subsequently translated into English, and published under the title of "A Voyage to Ethiopia" in 1709. He has much to say of his desert wanderings:

> "From that very Day we enter'd a frightful Desart. These Desarts are extremely dangerous, because the Sands being moving are rais'd by the least wind which darken the Air, and following afterwards in Clouds, Passengers are often buried in them or at least lose the route which they ought to keep. . . . The heat is so excessive, and the sand of these Desarts so burning, that there is no marching barefoot, without having one's Feet extremely swell'd. Nevertheless the Nights are cold enough, which occasions troublesome Distempers in those who Travel through that Country, unless they take great Precautions. . . . Those vast Wildernesses, where there is neither to be found Bird, nor wild Beast, nor herbs, no nor so much as a little Fly, and where nothing is to be seen but Mountains of Sand, and the Carcasses and Bones of Camels, Imprint a certain horrour in the Mind, which makes the Voyage very tedious and disagreeable. It would be a hard matter, to Cross those frightful Desarts without the Assistance of Camels. These Animals will continue six or seven days, without either eating or drinking, which I could never have believ'd, if I had not observ'd it very particularly."

A century later Browne visited the oasis, and after him a number of travellers, among them Hoskins, whose beautiful drawings of the ruined temples in the oasis are still valuable to archæologists. Then came a long gap, till the arrival of the Rohlfs Expedition from Germany in 1874, resulting in accurate and valuable records. Since that date Mr. Beadnell has published his interesting book on Kharga, entitled "An Egyptian Oasis." The greatest change that the place has witnessed in modern times

has been the building of the Western Oases Railway. This work was part of a scheme inaugurated by a company known as the Western Oases Corporation, to develop the trade of Kharga and Dakhla and to put a large area of the barren floor of the two oases under cultivation. The natives welcomed the first train, and the Omda of Kharga rushed off to Alexandria for the bathing season! But unfortunately the scheme has not been a success. The drifting sand-dunes moving ever southwards are largely responsible. It is pitiful to see some fertile little garden being gradually engulfed, and to observe the futile efforts made by the inhabitants to keep their relentless foe away with screens of matting on the north side of their orchards and cultivated patches.

The headquarters of the Corporation is at Sherika, and the numerous buildings have been occupied for military purposes during the present war. The hotel has been used as a hospital. It has tiled floors and real glass windows, though otherwise it would not be considered luxurious by modern travellers. Report says that fabulous prices were charged to visitors who were eccentric enough to wish to stay there, and those of us who have lived in Sherika have never discovered why anyone should wish to stay there. Only in mid-winter is it cool enough to be pleasant, and then the nights are bitterly cold, with the thermometer hovering round freezing-point. In winter the views of the great arc of cliffs forming the escarpment are very fine. There is a satisfying sense of vast spaces around one. The beautiful temple of Hibis is only a few miles away. The bold outlines of two lofty hills, whose Arabic names are paraphrased by the Tommies as "Jimmy" and "Jemima," are a striking feature. But that is all. Sherika is a handful of white and blue stucco buildings, mostly one storey high, with a mosque, dropped down in the middle of the desert for no very apparent reason. The sand blows in drifts across the oasis floor from the north. It covers the patches of irrigation, blocks the railway-track, and is accumulating in a bank outside the "hotel" and the other buildings. In a few years it will swallow them up unless some preventive measures can be taken. The few and fortunate officers of the garrison live in an extensive white bungalow with a deep verandah, formerly the residence of the chief man of the concern. Just outside this build-

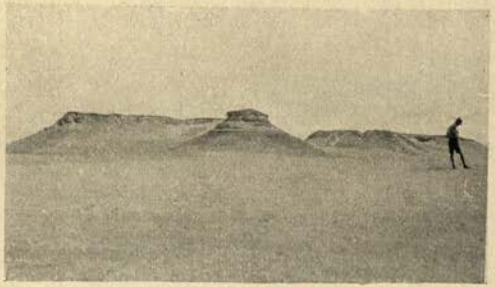
ing, in a little group of trees, is a small cemented swimming-bath in the open air. A fast-flowing spring runs into it. In winter I have found the water much warmer than the air temperature.

A few hundred yards away, near a vineyard half buried in sand, is a larger bath used by the men. These fine bathing-pools do much to mitigate conditions in what must be one of the hottest stations occupied by a British garrison. Water is very plentiful in the Kharga Oasis, but the origin of the underground supply is still unknown. It may be the result of rain in Tropical Africa, passing through level water-bearing strata for hundreds of miles, or it may flow underground from one of the Nubian reaches of the Nile, where much water escapes that cannot be accounted for.

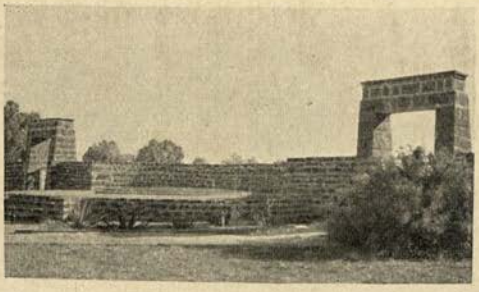
One of the tasks of a sanitarian at Sherika is to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes in the numerous ditches and irrigated areas near the camp. It is in just such a camp as this that "oiling" and other preventive meaures are worth undertaking, for the comparatively small areas affected can be thoroughly dealt with, and there is a stretch of dry sand surrounding them. When camps are surrounded by miles and miles of stagnant flooded country, it is only a waste of oil to attempt it. If one has seen a "petrol queue" struggling outside a shop in Cairo, one is inclined to use oil sparingly, even when the Army pays for it.

The most attractive place within a short walk of Sherika Camp is, curiously enough, the military cemetery. One never expects anything connected with a modern graveyard or a modern army to be attractive, but by some extraordinary accident the authorities seem to have secured the services of a man of taste—obviously an architect—to lay out their modest God's acre. The severe Egyptian pylon-like entrance gateways, without a hint of ornament about them, and the little apsidal recess in the centre show an austere refinement that one seldom sees in such places. A few cypresses and tamarisks surround the plain stone walls, and the blue hills of the Libyan escarpment form the background. If all cemeteries were as free as this from the pretentious efforts of the monumental mason, they would add to the beauty of the landscape instead of being, as they generally are, places to avoid.

The most interesting relics of bygone days in the Kharga



VIEW NEAR "B. 6." ON BAHARIA RAILWAY.



BRITISH CEMETERY, SHERIKA.



TAMARISKS NEAR SHERIKA.



TEMPLE OF HIBIS AT NADURA.

To face page 164.

Oasis may be visited from Sherika in the course of a day's camel ride. Many of us who have been in Egypt for two or three years are learning a good deal about the ways of camels, and one is fortunate if one's mount is an Indian camel provided with a saddle and stirrups, such as the Bikanir Camel Corps possesses. Camels are not by any means all alike. The slow-moving beasts used by the Camel Transport Corps in tens of thousands in Palestine are very different from the *hegin*, or fast-trotting camel, used by fighting units. Egyptian riding-camels, such as are used by the Imperial Camel Corps and by the Soudanese coast-guards, have saddles without stirrups. The rider's legs are crossed over the front of the saddle, and his seat is somewhat precarious. The Bikanirs use a padded leather double saddle, allowing two men to ride on each camel if necessary, with two pairs of stirrups. In the winter it is the pleasant habit of camels to become *muss* (*i.e.*, savage), and they may even go *magnoon* (mad). A camel in the latter condition will bite a man's head or hand off; and these occurrences are by no means rare. When the brute emits a horrible gurgling noise from its inside, and puffs a hideous membrane out of its mouth, one may be prepared for trouble. Last time I left Kharga on a day's joy-ride, my Indian escort was riding one of these suspicious animals, but my own, which seemed quite free from guile, suddenly took a violent bite out of the tail of the camel in front. We were then riding between the metals of the narrow-gauge railway, but the camel that had been bitten merely gurgled and trotted on rather faster. The more I see of camels and their ways, the less I can understand how some of these camel corps officers can have any affection for them. Yet sometimes this is so.

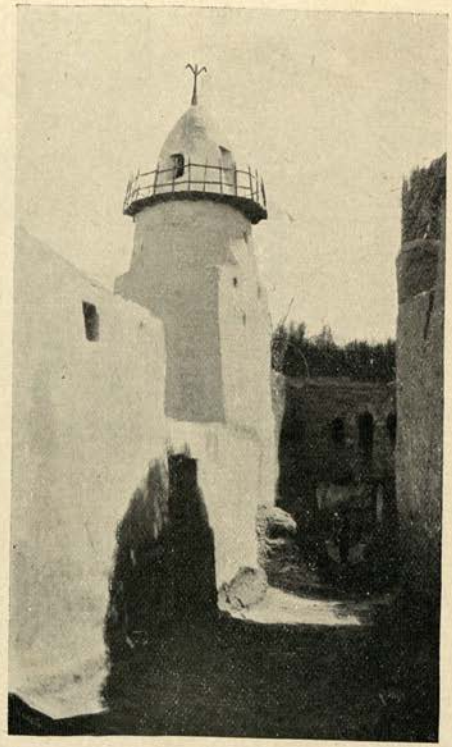
One fine August day a party of us rode from Sherika to the village of Kharga, seven or eight miles away. The country between the two places is simply desert. The village is more interesting. It has no buildings of note, the primitive minarets of two simple white-washed mosques being the only outstanding features in the place. But the streets are arranged on a curious plan. Many of them are completely covered by upper rooms connected with the adjoining houses on either side, so that they have a tunnel-like appearance, which has gained for them the name of "the underground village." There are many gardens

and flowering trees among the houses, producing a tropical effect in many of the little lanes with their whitewashed walls. Compared with many Egyptian villages, Kharga is clean. Our party, six officers and two Bikanir soldiers, paid a call on the Omda. He regaled us with tea, sitting on a long stone bench covered with matting, under the shade of the local town-hall. He was a man of few words, and those only Arabic, but he was quite equal to the occasion, though he had only six cups. If it were not a peculiarly inappropriate simile, I should be inclined to say that there were no flies on him.

We next proceeded to the temple of Hibis, near Nadura. This should have been only two miles away, but we were all strangers, and the Bikanirs led us into a *cul-de-sac* in a jungle of palms and mimosa-trees. At last we saw the columns of the temple in the date-groves on our left, and dismounted near it. Of the city of Hibis, or Hebt, little remains to be seen, but it has been partially excavated. At one time it was the residence of a Governor, and the most important place in the oasis.

The Temple of Ammon at Hibis is the work of Darius, the Persian King, as has already been noted in this chapter. It is unique as the only existing temple of this period, and it is in a wonderfully perfect state of preservation. The material used throughout is sandstone. Up to a few years ago it was half buried in sand. One of Hoskins' beautiful drawings shows its appearance some eighty years ago. In 1908-09 an American expedition, organised by the Metropolitan Museum of New York, supported by Mr. Pierpont Morgan, and in collaboration with the Egyptian Government's archæologists, began the removal of the sand and the excavation of the ruins. For part of the time 200 workmen were employed, and a light railway was made round the building. Some of the columns that had collapsed were re-erected, and portions of the walls were rebuilt with fallen stones. It appears that the building remained in good order until the third or fourth century A.D., when it was allowed to fall into decay. Private houses were permitted to encroach on the temple area, and a small Christian Church was built in its north-east corner. This church remained in use up to the Arab conquest of Egypt.

As we see it to-day this temple is one of the best preserved in



MOSQUE IN KHARGA VILLAGE.



INTERIOR OF TEMPLE OF HIBIS.

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Egypt. The walls are covered with sharply cut reliefs, and on many of these the original colouring is still plainly visible. The principal building, or temple proper, measures 146 feet by 62 feet, and is 28 feet high. It is approached by a series of pylons and avenues, like all Egyptian buildings of the kind, including an avenue of sphinxes. Many of these external features are in a ruinous state, and some have practically disappeared. But, interesting as this temple is, even to casual visitors, one cannot help puzzling over the reason for its erection here. Hibis was 130 miles from the Nile. Why were workmen brought over that arid waste to build here? Nor is this the only monumental structure in the oasis. Ten miles south of Kharga village is a beautiful though ruined Ptolemaic temple, the work of Euergetes, known as Kasr Gaîtah. There is a small Roman temple at Nadura, close to the site of Hibis. Dr. Wallis Budge gives the following explanation of this building activity:

> "None of the Kings of Egypt built temples solely with the view of spreading the knowledge of their religion among the outlying peoples of their Empire, for none of them possessed the spirit of missionary enterprise. They built temples in the Soudan and the Oases and Sinai solely with the idea of encouraging and developing trade and commerce, and temples and their neighbouring buildings served both as fortified outposts and storage-places for gold and other merchandise. The great trade-route from Egypt to Darfur passed through the Oasis of Kharga, and the temples stood near it, so that the garrisons might afford protection for the caravans and the goods which they brought from the far south. The temple of Dûsh (Kysis) was at the south end of the oasis, and the temple of Kharga at the north. Wherever an important trade centre existed, there was a temple built. Darius, the Ptolemies, and the Romans developed the Soudan trade to a remarkable degree, and the temples of the oasis prove that the products of the south were of great value. In recent years the glory of the old Forty Days Road (Darb-al-Arba'in) has departed, and the British have caused most of the Soudan trade to follow the course of the Nile. Should that route, however, become unsafe, the

old desert roads would be again used by the merchants, and caravans would travel to the south by the routes which they followed for thousands of years."

A few minutes' walk from the Temple of Darius, on the slope of a small hill, is one of the most singular antiquities in the oasis. It is a large early Christian cemetery, apparently of the fifth century A.D., and is known as El Bagawat. It consists of some 200 chapels and tombs, built of mud bricks. Most of the former are square, domed structures, but another type, also domed, is much smaller, and serves only as a cover for a deep graveshaft. The chapels were originally faced with plaster, inside and out. The interiors of several are decorated with frescoes of Biblical interest, floral and animal forms being used. Some of these are illustrated in the *Bulletin* for November, 1908, of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, which sent out an expedition to explore this cemetery in that year. The mummified corpses are still to be seen. Salt was found by the explorers in most of the tombs, and this—coupled with the extreme dryness of the climate—probably accounts for the wonderful state of preservation of the bodies. When I visited the cemetery two mummies of children, very scantily bandaged, had just been discovered by some natives, and the little figures had a curiously pathetic life-likeness about them. I noticed that most of the faces of saints in the painted decorations had been obliterated, presumably by Moslems. It was less easy to explain the Greek characters scrawled all over the walls.

Close to the cemetery are a number of brick vaults, which are known as Ain-el-Turba, probably slightly older than the chapels and tombs. A quantity of pottery, glass, beads, and coins, was found here by the American expedition.

These are the principal objects within a day's march of Sherika Camp. Some of the brick-vaulted native cottages in the neighbourhood are curious, and the tamarisk-trees with their feathery branches are very beautiful. One unusual tree that is found in this oasis is the doum-palm, or gingerbread-tree, with fan-like leaves on gnarled and branched trunks, very different from the tall, straight stem of the date-palm. Mimosa-trees, with their small, yellow, scented flowers, are also abundant.

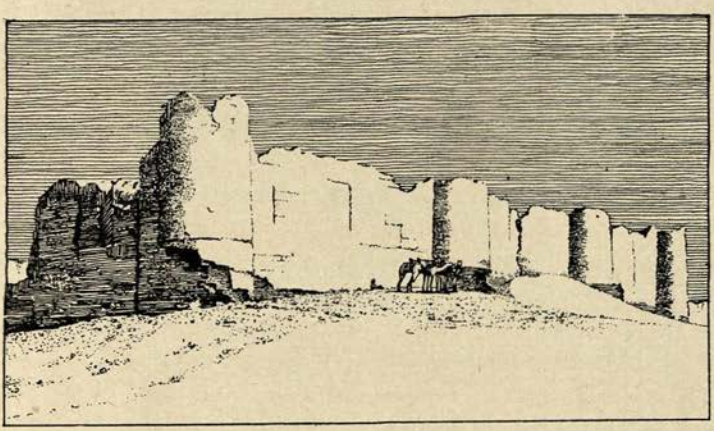
From Kharga Station, near the village, the railway continues for some distance, over broken desert country, along the line of the old caravan route leading to the Dakhla Oasis. In Roman times Kharga and Dakhla seem to have been regarded as one, and known as the "Great Oasis." Undoubtedly there has been a great change in the appearance of the country. A shallow lake is known to have filled the central part of the depression, and probably covered the site of the present Sherika Camp.

My own travels never led me beyond the Railhead. Orders to proced to Dakhla on one of the Ford cars were cancelled just as I was about to start. Very few soldiers have seen the Dakhla Oasis, though some of the adventurous spirits who have explored the almost unknown regions between Baharia, Siwa, and Moghara, have ventured to its confines in their patrol duties. But beyond Dakhla one reaches the great belt of sand-dunes extending to the inaccessible oasis of Kufra in Italian territory, where the headquarters of the Senussi sect are. These sand-dunes form an impenetrable barrier hundreds of miles wide. Several attempts to cross them have proved fruitless, notably that made by the Rohlfs Expedition. The Libyan Desert is said to be the most arid area in the whole world, and the most inhospitable portion of the great Sahara Desert. Its area is seven times as large as the British Isles. Camel caravans crossing from one oasis to another, or from the oases to the Nile, traverse extraordinary distances in a day. A convoy escorted by natives on foot usually moves at $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour for 10 hours a day, thus marching 25 miles. Riding-camels, on the other hand, will do 60 miles a day, and Beadnell in his book states that he has done 110 to 120 miles in 30 to 35 hours, travelling in two stages of 12 hours each, with an interval between of 9 to 10 hours.

In spite of its remote position, Dakhla is the most important of the Libyan oases as regards cultivated area, water-supply, and population. The inhabitants, who number over 18,000, are almost entirely dependent on the date trade, and there are some 200,000 date-palms. There are numerous Roman wells still in use, some of which have hot springs, and there is a ruined Roman temple named Deir-el-Hagar ("the Monastery of Stone") near the principal village. But to an antiquary the Dakhla Oasis does not compare with Kharga.

The Farafra Oasis is small, unimportant, and without archæological interest. A small volume, in the series of official Reports on all these oases issued by the Egyptian Government, describes it in detail.

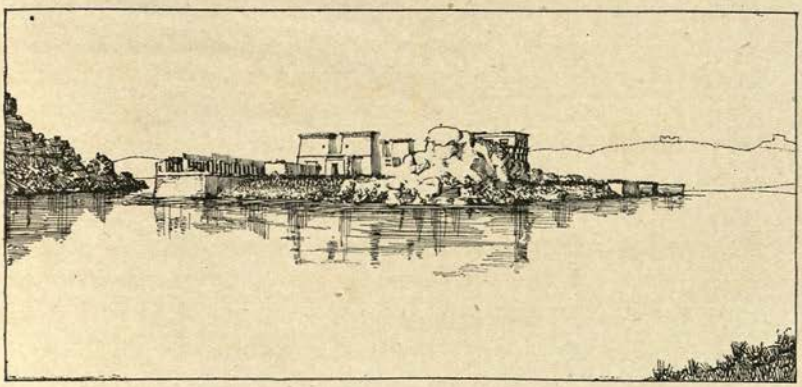
Baharia, on the other hand, is only too well known to the E.E.F., and therefore finds a place in this chapter. Its name means the "Northern" oasis, and this describes its position accurately enough. It lies about the same distance as Kharga does from the Nile Valley, and is separated from the latter by a similar tract of barren stony desert, traversed by a belt of steep sand-dunes. To reach Baharia at the present time one leaves the main Cairo-Luxor line at Maghagha, a town on the river-bank, with no special features of interest. Usually one has a wait of several hours here. There is a rest-house for officials on the upper floor of the station building. Here one can get a bed and a cup of tea to lubricate "the unconsumed portion of the day's ration." A wise man carries his own provisions on such journeys, for these towns are not replete with railway restaurants or other modern conveniences. It is worth while taking a walk down to the Nile at Maghagha or Wasta, for that marvellous river has always some fresh aspect to offer to a traveller. From Maghagha one crawls across irrigated fields of cotton and *dhurra* in a light railway-train, changing at a junction *en route*, and arrives after a couple of hours at Sandafa Station, on the bank of the Bahr-Yussuf River, that has already figured in my chapter on the Fayyum. Here there is a junction with the "Baharia Military Railway," a product of the present war. The terminus station of this line, just across the Bahr-Yussuf, is named Bahnassa, after the adjoining village. Bahnassa is on the boundary between mosquitoes and desert, as many weary soldiers know full well. But it has a historical interest; for here are the ruins of Oxyrhyncos, an ancient city whose coins and other relics are easily obtainable by military souvenir-hunters. Here the object of worship was a fish, and the neighbouring city of Cynopolis prostrated itself before our friend the dog. "Plutarch relates how 'a very pretty quarrel,' the settlement of which required the intervention of the Romans, arose between the two towns, because the citizens of each had killed and dined on the sacred animals of the other."



ROMAN FORT AT EL DERIS.



MOSLEM CEMETERY, BAHNASSA.



THE TEMPLES AT PHILAE.

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But Oxyrhyncos is chiefly noted for the famous papyrus that was recently found there, inscribed with some reputed sayings of Christ. These are not included in the Gospels, but are regarded by many scholars as authentic. In the fifth century the town included twelve churches and a large number of convents. It is stated that there were over 20,000 monks and nuns in the diocese. The Egypt Exploration Fund has published an account of the place in its archæological reports for 1896-97.

From Bahnassa Station, after one has spent ten hours in travelling from Cairo—130 miles away—one is permitted to board the sumptuous sleeping-saloon allotted to officers on the B.M.R. It consists of a small closed van with four stretchers screwed to wooden posts. It was once painted white inside, and so is still comparatively clean in appearance. The train shakes so, when travelling at its maximum velocity of twenty miles an hour, that one cannot read, and sleep is almost equally impossible, but things might be worse. They are much worse for the "other ranks," who are favoured neither with stretchers, nor white paint, nor a covered van. The train halts for some time at Shousha Camp, at one time a very large one, and then rattles over a perfectly featureless desert for several hours. Between two and three o'clock next morning it stops. I have never yet discovered why the line should end there rather than anywhere else. This is "B. 6," a name of obviously military origin. "B. 6" is a station —that is to say, a place where there is a siding. It lies in the midst of a slight depression in the desert, surrounded on all sides by sand. South of the station is a curiously shaped hill, the rocky top being undercut by some geological action. "B. 6" seems the abomination of desolation and the end of all things—a little group of huts and tents and wire set in the midst of a limitless wilderness. If one climbs to the top of the curiously shaped hill, one can see nothing for miles and miles but sand and rocks. "B. 6" is not even the Baharia, but the point from which to begin the next stage of the journey to that delectable spot.

The only means of crossing the belt of sand-dunes that separates "B. 6" from the oasis is on camel-back. One blazing August morning two of us started on this pilgrimage, our valises tied on to our saddles. The sun was already high in the heavens

as we sallied out from the hut where we had slept, with jerboas hopping over our pillows. Our escort of Bikanirs led us along a track zigzagged for some time over stony ridges and then over steep sand-dunes with "razor-edges." Some of the rock formation that we passed on the way was unusual. There was one projecting crag exactly resembling a human head. It has always seemed to me that the sculptors of the Sphinx and of those great figures at Abu Simbel in Nubia must have had these natural portraits in mind. Perhaps the originator of the Sphinx found his great conception half modelled by Nature herself.

Having crossed the sand-dunes, we entered on a region of appalling desolation, after some four hours' riding. The whole landscape consisted of jagged rocks. At a certain place, fifteen miles from "B. 6," which the Bikanirs seemed to find by instinct, a Ford car met us, and bumped us over rocks and stones for fifteen miles more to our destination, a little camp standing on the top of a lofty cliff and overlooking the Baharia Oasis. Here we were quartered in a stone hut, stone being by far the most economical building material available.

The one and only redeeming feature of this camp was the view of the plain below, studded with palm-trees. It was on the whole the loneliest and most inaccessible place I have visited in Egypt—lonely partly because so few Britishers were among the little garrison. Nor was there anything in the neighbourhood to act as an antidote. Down on the plain was a well, Ain Legalit, or Gelid, but it was only one of the minor wells of the oasis, and the wretched hamlet of Harra, a few hundred yards away in its clump of palms, was the only inhabited place for miles round. The ground near the well was marshy, with patches of scrub and grass. It is said that this ground is so treacherous in places that a man may walk over the solid crust, but that a camel will go through it into the quagmire below.

From the camp one could not see right across the oasis, as the view was impeded by isolated hills rising from the plain. Baharia possesses more of these hills than any other oasis, and the largest group attains a height of over 400 feet above the general level of the surrounding floor, which is itself over 400 feet above sea-level. Another feature peculiar to Baharia is the continuity of the escarpment. In the Kharga, Dakhla, and Siwa

Oases, one or more boundaries are formed by gentle slopes of rocky ground or by sand-dunes. Water is found at shallow depths, and is conveyed from its sources to the wells by underground aqueducts dating from Roman times.

Only a small portion of the whole area is cultivated, but in comparison with the scanty population there is a very large number of date-palms. The total at the last census was 93,000, giving an average of 15 per head of the inhabitants. Taxes are levied on the people of these oases on a basis of date-palms, at a rate of 1½d. per tree per annum. The price of a camel-load of dates packed in two baskets of plaited grass is 10s. in the oasis and about £2 in the Nile Valley, thus allowing a profit of 30s., or 300 per cent., to the Bedouin who acts as carrier. Although dates are the chief product of this oasis, large quantities of olives, apricots, grapes, pomegranates, oranges, and figs, are grown; and rice, wheat, barley, and clover, are cultivated in the small fields. The beautiful maidenhair fern is also found.

The inhabitants live in four large villages and a few smaller ones. These villages are chiefly composed of squalid huts. There are comparatively few antiquities in the oasis, though it is said to have been a penal settlement in Roman times. Most of these remains were discovered and described by Steindorff in 1900, as he returned from his visit to Siwa, and are illustrated in his book already quoted. They consist of ruined fragments of two Egyptian temples and some tombs, decorated with mural reliefs, besides a few smaller objects. There are also relics of Roman and Coptic times. The little mosque, the covered streets, and the gardens, in the village of Bawitti, recall the village of Kharga. But in comparison with Kharga, Baharia offers few inducements to an archæologist to traverse a hundred miles of desert. Soldiers who have trudged for days over the Libyan Desert, and sweltered for months in the pitiless heat of summer in either Kharga or Baharia, can hardly have felt that an occasional temple or a ruined tomb was very adequate compensation for their hardships.

CHAPTER X

THE VALLEY OF THE NILE

IN attempting any description of Egypt as it has appeared to our Army during the present war, it is impossible to ignore that part of it which has always been most important—the valley of the Nile. We may have lived mainly in the desert, but there have always been garrisons at certain points in Upper Egypt, convalescents have basked in the sunshine at Luxor, and the more fortunate of us have contrived to visit some of the temples and tombs at ancient Thebes and elsewhere. In so doing we have been following in the footsteps of the tourists, yet we have seen these places under very different conditions. Even in the peaceful valley of the Nile the war has made itself felt. This short chapter, then, will not compete with the many admirable guide-books or impressionist studies of Upper Egypt that are easily obtainable elsewhere. As in the chapters on Alexandria and on Cairo, I shall endeavour to picture this well-worn trail as the British soldier has seen it during the past two years.

It must be admitted that we have not done our sight-seeing under the best conditions. The tourists who boarded a comfortable steamer at Cairo, and floated luxuriously up to Luxor and Assouan in times of peace, were fortunate folk. For it is only from the deck of a steamer or *dahabiyeh* that one can really see all the wonders of the Nile Valley to advantage. The railway follows the course of the river, and the trains are comfortable enough. But hardly any of the places best worth a visit between Cairo and Luxor can be included in the very few days' leave available even for the luckier members of the E.E.F. And, even if one has ample time, it is difficult to see Abydos or Dendera or Edfu in daylight between trains, unless one cares to sleep in the waiting-room and carry one's own provisions.

The Egyptian railway authorities, like those in England, have reduced their train services. The Sleeping Car Company has omitted many of the usual restaurant-cars and raised the price for meals, alike on the trains and in the few buffets, to such a price that only dire necessity will induce an economical soul to pay it. At the Luxor buffet, the most important one south of Cairo, I was unable to buy a single thing to eat at Christmas, 1917. Not a piece of bread, nor an egg, nor a sandwich—not even a bar of chocolate was available. Moreover, the hotels between Cairo and Luxor are not particularly well adapted to the fastidious taste of the globe-trotting Englishman. He is supposed to view the temples from a tourist steamer, where he can eat and sleep in his own way; but now the steamers are no more. The result of all these changed conditions is that the desert-sick soldier who visits Upper Egypt on leave almost always travels direct from Cairo to Luxor by the night train, missing the many interesting places *en route*, but ensuring for himself civilised meals and a comfortable bed. Most of us have only been allowed seventy-two hours' leave from Cairo to visit Luxor, and that allowance does not permit of much wandering from the beaten track.

The scenery of the Nile Valley does not vary very much in the 400 miles odd of this long journey. When one has passed the long line of Pyramids already mentioned in Chapter III., there are no outstanding features. On either hand is the broad band of rich cultivation studded with palms and mud villages, and generally the bold cliffs of the desert escarpment form the background on east and west. From time to time one passes a large and crowded town, with a few European houses and Government buildings appearing above the hovels of the *fellahin*. The long panorama is always beautiful at the beginning and end of the day. Dawn in the Nile Valley is a wonderful sight. The palms rise grey and ghostly out of the mist. Strings of donkeys and camels pass along the dyke that runs alongside the line, their native owners wrapped closely in their white or black robes till the sun rises. But sunset is more wonderful still, and any attempt to describe its marvels would tax all the powers of a far more competent pen than mine.

To the majority of people, Upper Egypt implies the Nile

Valley from Beni Suef or Minia to Assouan. It is simply a long green strip between the vast desert areas on east and west. It is hardly necessary to recall the saying of Herodotus that "Egypt is the gift of the Nile," a tract covered by 30 feet of black mud that the river has washed away from tropical regions thousands of miles away in the heart of Africa. Egypt consists of the Nile Valley, the Delta, and the Fayyum; and all this land is "the gift of the Nile." Without the Nile it would be a barren wilderness. Some of these characteristics are as trite now as they were in the days of the ancient Greek geographers, and they always will be trite, for little ever changes in this valley. Nevertheless, they will always impress the traveller, for they explain the whole life of the country.

The north wind, for instance, that blows so consistently during the middle hours of the day in Egypt is probably mentioned in elementary geography books. But to me, at any rate—perhaps because I left school a good many years ago—it was a revelation to find that Egypt was a windy place. There would be few complaints of dust and sand in desert camps if it were not for the wind, which one generally hates with a violent hatred. But without the wind the heat would be insupportable. And the north wind itself seems part of the beneficent scheme of life in the Nile Valley, for it blows the sailing-boats from north to south against the stream, Providence already having provided them with a current to take them in the other direction. In all the records of ancient Egypt these Nile boats play a prominent part. There are wonderful old wooden models of them, as they were rowed across the river with some royal corpse as their burden, in the Cairo Museum. They are depicted in frescoes and carved in low-relief on temple walls. The Nile must have been a busy highway from the beginning of Egyptian history. Herodotus describes a religious festival on its banks in his day:

> "Men and women come sailing all together, vast numbers in each boat, many of the women with castanets, which they strike, while some of the men pipe during the whole period of the voyage; the remainder of the voyagers, male and female, sing the while, and make a clapping with their hands. When they arrive opposite any of the towns upon

the banks of the stream, they approach the shore, and, while some of the women continue to play and sing, others call aloud to the females of the place, and load them with abuse, while a certain number dance, and some standing up, uncover themselves."

At the present day men in these boats may be heard aimlessly piping and clapping their hands. The other rites described above are less familiar, and may have died out with the ancient faith. Herodotus mentions another custom that would never be allowed under modern administration in Egypt. He states that a certain city on the Nile . . . "a place of note, is assigned expressly to the wife of the ruler of Egypt for the time being, to keep her in shoes." One constantly sees boats laden with those porous earthenware vessels that the natives call *goolahs* if they are small and *zeers* if they are very large. They are made in great quantities round Assiut, and have hardly changed their form during many centuries. But the British soldier, who uses them to keep his drinking-water cool and clear, insists on calling them by the Indian name of *chatties.*

In one's childhood Egypt was vaguely associated with camels, plagues, bulrushes, Potiphar's wife, Moses, and crocodiles. And no doubt these various items were features of the country at one time. But the weary warrior who expects to see crocodiles by taking a leave-ticket to Luxor will be disappointed. No longer does their plaintive song haunt the banks of the Nile. Bull-frogs, mosquitoes, and other small deer, make life hideous, but the crocodile is no longer found north of the Second Cataract, the modern political boundary of Egypt. It has been relegated to the limbo of dead, forgotten, far-off things. Herodotus has much to say of its habits, but the following passage is the cream of the description:

"As it lives chiefly in the river, it has the inside of its mouth constantly covered with leeches; hence it happens that, while all the other birds and beasts avoid it, with the trochilus it lives at peace, since it owes much to that bird; for the crocodile, when he leaves the water and comes out upon the land, is in the habit of lying with his mouth wide

open, facing the western breeze; at such times the trochilus goes into his mouth and devours the leeches. This benefits the crocodile, who is pleased, and takes care not to hurt the trochilus."

The same writer has other useful notes on the natural history of the Nile. After describing the breeding habits of a certain species of fish, he continues:

> "When any of this sort of fish are taken on their passage to the sea, they are found to have the left side of the head scarred and bruised; while if taken on their return, the marks appear on the right. The reason is, that as they swim down the Nile seaward, they keep close to the bank of the river upon their left, and returning again up-stream they still cling to the same side, hugging it and brushing against it constantly, to be sure they miss not their road through the great force of the current."

This very creditable effort at an angler's yarn is followed, a few paragraphs later, by hints on dealing with the mosquito problem:

> "The contrivances which they use against gnats, wherewith the country swarms, are the following. In the parts of Egypt above the marshes the inhabitants pass the night upon lofty towers, which are of great service, as the gnats are unable to fly to any height on account of the winds. In the marsh country, where there are no towers, each man possesses a net instead. By day it serves him to catch fish, while at night he spreads it over the bed on which he is at rest, and creeping in goes to sleep underneath. The gnats, which, if he rolls himself up in his dress or in a piece of muslin, are sure to bite through the covering, do not so much as attempt to pass the net."

Lastly, Herodotus' description of the annual inundation of the Nile is worth quoting, for it is as true to-day as when it was written:

> "When the Nile overflows, the country is converted into a sea, and nothing appears but the cities, which look like

the islands in the Ægean. At this season boats no longer keep the course of the river, but sail right across the plain."

If no soldier in the E.E.F. had ever "proceeded on short leave" to Luxor or Assouan, if there had never been a single military camp in the upper valley of the Nile, we should still have a direct interest in the life of the *fellahin* of Upper Egypt. For here are recruited the bulk of the Egyptian Labour Corps, who have played such an important part in the defence of the Canal, and later in the advance into Palestine. In each of the larger towns is a recruiting-office under military control. Probably the best men in the E.L.C. are drawn from Upper Egypt. They are slower of mind and less intelligent, but more reliable, than the townsman from Alexandria or Cairo. They have been used to continuous manual labour for long hours every day, always digging or working a *shadoof*. The *shadoof* seems to typify somehow the whole of agricultural life in the valley of the Nile. It is very primitive, very simple, very detrimental to the intellect, and very hard to work. All day long one sees little brown-skinned figures swinging the buckets of water up the high bank of the river into an irrigation channel. As one watches, the action becomes almost mechanical, and such patience seems inhuman. Even the blindfolded ox turning the *sakkiyeh* has met his match here.

In many cases the villages of Upper Egypt are less squalid and poverty-stricken than those of the Delta, but there is little to choose between them. Human beings herd with hens and goats in windowless hovels roofed with flea-laden straw. In some villages the principal building is the communal pigeon-cote. There is a very sharp contrast between the untidy squalor of the native huts and the trim cleanliness of the European officials' large white houses, with their green verandahs and shutters and their often beautiful gardens. But Egypt is noted for its contrasts. Most of the wretched native dwellings possess "Primus" stoves, which must be used in hundreds of thousands in the country as a whole. Every village has its pariah dogs, which yelp and moan round any adjoining military camp at night, and have less fighting instinct than a guinea-pig. Some villages supply labour to neighbouring camps direct, instead of

sending recruits to the E.L.C. In this case the C.O. of the camp makes a contract with the local *omda*, and the latter is responsible for seeing that the labourers have adequate clothing, boots, and cooking utensils, whereas in the case of the E.L.C. all equipment and clothing is supplied by the Army.

Between Luxor and Assouan the living population seems to be far outnumbered by the dead. For miles one passes through Arab cemeteries with their simple headstones and their waving rags. In this part of Egypt, too, one notices great flocks of sheep and goats. At one station I remember seeing a bearded Franciscan monk, in the usual brown cassock with the usual rope round his ample waist, wearing a khaki pith-helmet of military pattern. The incongruity of the costume may be imagined.

The places best known to soldiers in Upper Egypt are naturally towns of some size, where troops were quartered during the Senussi campaign. In such centres as Assiut, Minia, Girga, and Sohag, there is a nucleus of English officials. Life for the officers was thus varied with a little gaiety on the local tennis-courts or golf-links. I venture to reproduce an invitation, which I once saw on the notice-board of a certain garrison mess, to a festival at the "Sporting Club of ——"

> "I have the honour to inform you that there will be a celebration of horse and camel races on Friday the ——, at 2.30 p.m. We beg you to flourish this celebration by encouraging your horsemen and camelmen to take part in these races. You will honour the races by your presence and many thanks."
>
> "_____
>
> "*President of the Club.*
>
> "N.B.—Tickets of entrance are sold at the gate."

Every now and then one comes on examples of English in Egypt that compare very favourably with some of those choice Babu jewels that *Punch* used to delight in. For instance, a tram ride from Cairo to Abbassia enables one to see at least two specimens:

"COFFEE CHOP OF EUROP."

"HIGH T LIF TAILOR."

The first disguises the name of a *café;* the second is a well-meaning though misguided effort to reconcile High Tea and High Life, the latter being a favourite addition to a tailor's sign-board in Cairo.

The European quarter in the larger Nile towns is usually well laid out with avenues of lebbak-trees, stone-edged "sidewalks," and electric light. The houses are substantial and generally surrounded by flowering trees and gardens. The schools and public buildings, too, are solid European structures. In Assiut there is a large American mission, with ugly but spacious premises. Among the European houses and schools are numerous mansions of wealthy Egyptians, who were never more prosperous than at the present moment. Some of the hotels in Egypt that are nominally dependent on tourists are now enjoying a sort of Indian summer, their new guests being Levantines and Egyptians who are making fortunes out of Europe's misery.

Anyone who wishes to read of the details of camp life in Upper Egypt should refer to the sketch entitled "The Plagues of Egypt" by "Yeo," in that writer's delightful volume of war-impressions, "Soldier-Men." Here also will be found many brilliant vignettes of the campaign against the Senussi, where one has no difficulty in recognising, under the initials S—— and M——, some very accurate descriptions of Sollum and Matruh.

Luxor was, at one period of the war, a military centre, for a huge hotel was utilised as a convalescent home. At that time its streets and shops were filled with lads in grey and blue hospital suits. But all through the war there has been a sprinkling of officers and nursing-sisters in its hotels to compensate the proprietors for keeping even one hotel open. What a change from those glorious days four years ago when wealth from London and America was pouring into the pockets of the two or three "combines" who run Upper Egypt! Now it is difficult for two hotels, and those not the largest, to find even a handful of visitors, whereas at Assouan guests are even more scarce. And both Luxor and Assouan are towns that live almost entirely on visitors, especially the former. The name Luxor (in Arabic, *El-Uksur*) means "the Palaces," and its attraction lies firstly in the series of magnificent old buildings that lie in it and round it. But it has only been a tourist resort and a place of any note since

1886, when Mr. John M. Cook, of "Cook's Tours," took it in hand. It was he who built the Luxor hotel, improved the town, and inaugurated the regular service of steamers between Cairo and Assouan. The excavation of the temple at Luxor had been commenced only three years before.

The chief results of the war in Luxor are thus to be seen in the absence of steamers, in the closing of most of the hotels, and in the substitution of a handful of military officers for a small army of millionaires. Many of the shops, that contrived to exist during the time that the convalescent home was open, have since had to close down. Tea-rooms that ministered to the wants of Anzacs and Tommies when I was at Luxor early in 1916 were shuttered when I saw them two years later. The boom in over-priced "souvenirs," very largely worthless rubbish, must have continued well into 1916, but is becoming moribund now. One or two booksellers still do a fair trade in shilling editions. But there is only one industry that has really survived the war in Luxor, and that is the developing and printing of photographs. The number of Kodaks in the E.E.F. is phenomenal. The larger sizes, quarter plate and upwards, are chiefly used by officers whose luggage is not too vigorously restricted on service. The infantry subaltern generally has to follow the custom of apparently all Australian privates, and very many British Tommies, in carrying a "V.P.K." or some similar miniature camera. Cairo and Alexandria swarm with developing and printing establishments, into which films come for treatment in a steady stream, as they have already done for three years past. It would not be surprising to hear that Kodaks and their rivals have made as much money as any business concern in Egypt during the war. Photography is naturally practised by every visitor to Luxor who owns a camera. Not only is there an endless supply of subjects, but the light is remarkably strong and reliable, even in such "a land of light" as Egypt. So it has come to pass that the Luxor firms who develop and print for visitors have extended their businesses by post, and last summer were developing as many films of the neighbourhood of Gaza as of the temples of Thebes.

Most of the people in the town who do not sell souvenirs appear to be either guides or donkey-boys or boatmen, and they

have suffered from the famine of tourists. It is strange to think that this was a show place so long ago as the times of Strabo, who visited Thebes with a party of soldiers about 24 B.C., and wrote of the Colossi of Memnon as any modern tourist might do:

> "There are a great number of temples, many of which Cambyses mutilated. The spot is at present occupied by villages. One part of it, in which is the city, lies in Arabia; Another is in the country on the other side of the river, where is the Memnonium. Here are two colossal figures near one another, each consisting of a single stone. One is entire; the upper parts of the other, from the chair, are fallen down, the effect, it is said, of an earthquake. It is believed that once a day a noise as of a slight blow issues from the part of the statue which remains in the seat and on its base. When I was at those places with Ælius Gallus, and numerous friends and soldiers about him, I heard a noise at the first hour (of the day), but whether proceeding from the base or from the colossus, or produced on purpose by some of those standing round the base, I cannot confidently assert. For from the uncertainty of the cause I am disposed to believe anything rather than that stones disposed in that manner could send forth sound."

The temples and tombs that have made Luxor celebrated cannot be described in this short chapter, but the soldier who has served in Sinai and Palestine may be reminded that on the walls of the marvellous Hypostyle Hall—one of the wonders of the world—of the temple at Karnak is a long series of reliefs illustrating the wars of the ancient Egyptian Kings in those very regions. Here one may see the forts that they built to protect their water-stations, the castles and the wells, the reed-fringed canal that marked the boundary between Asia and Africa, the defeated Bedouins of Southern Palestine.

The journey from Luxor to Assouan by train occupies a whole day, though the distance is not very great. For that reason Assouan has not been visited by soldiers to anything like the same extent as Luxor, their leave being generally short. And if one has to choose between the two places, there is no doubt that Luxor is by far the more important to a stranger, for there

one sees all that is most typical of the civilisation of ancient Egypt. People with minds of a certain calibre always jeer at the hurried traveller, saying that of course one can see nothing of anything in two days. Such statements always seem to me to be particularly futile, for they would eliminate half the pleasant holidays the average man has. Cities in Italy and other European countries often remain clear cut in one's memory after a two days' visit. So also with soldier tourists in Egypt. A man who has read up Cairo before he sees it, who has mastered the elementary facts of Arab art, and who is gifted with any sort of intelligence, could obtain a very fair idea of Cairo in two days spent among mosques and bazaars. And even if he has only two days in Luxor, he would obtain a very fair notion of what the art of ancient Egypt means, provided that he came well prepared.

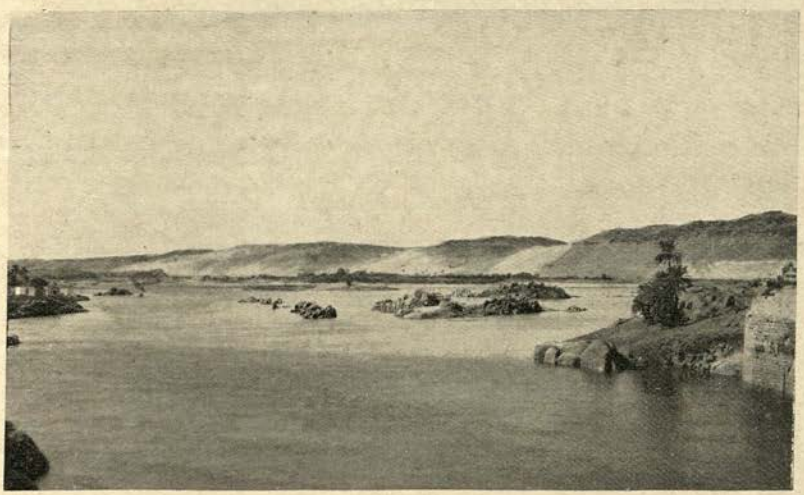
Assouan, on the other hand, is not primarily a place for archæologists. In peace-time it is presumably a health resort. But it is even now, as it always has been, the end of Egypt, the Mecca to which the millionaire tourist normally prolongs his journey. On the map, it is true, the southern frontier of Egypt has been shifted farther south by the politicians, to the Second Cataract at Wadi Halfa. But Assouan, at the First Cataract, is the terminus of the Egyptian railways, the starting-place of the Soudan steamers, the terminus of the steamers that sail southwards from Cairo. Here, after more than 500 miles, the scenery changes, and the long ribbon of green that has bordered the Nile all the way from the Delta gives place to a rocky gorge—the desert on either hand coming right up to the river-banks.

Herodotus quotes a judgment by the oracle of Ammon (in the Siwa Oasis) as to the southern boundary of Egypt. There were certain people in Libya who were partial to beef, a viand that was denied them by the customs of their nation. It occurred to them that they might be ruled to be Egyptians, as they lived near Lake Mariut, and so escape the Food Controller's restrictions. But the oracle was unfavourable, and defined the Egyptians as those who inhabited the Nile Valley below Elephantiné (Assouan), and drank the waters of that river.

It is interesting to read of the strategical frontiers of Egypt in those days. Herodotus states that one garrison was main-



THE NILE AT ASSOUAN.



THE FIRST CATARACT, ASSOUAN.

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tained in Assouan against the Ethiopians; one at Daphnæ, near Pelusium, against the people of Palestine; and one at Marea, west of Alexandria, against the Libyans.

The same writer accuses the people of Elephantiné of eating crocodiles. He also describes a certain chamber made of one block of stone, which was hewn from the granite quarries of Assouan (the ancient *Syene*), and took three years to transport to Saïs in the Delta. The modern visitor to Assouan invariably visits these remarkable quarries, and also the series of rock-tombs in the cliffs opposite Assouan, across the Nile. A guide who conducted me through these tombs pointed out a fresco in one of them depicting a deceased monarch making a hearty meal:

"You see 'is lunch? Feesh, fruit, one goose, one *cow-leg!*"

The "cow-leg" was beautifully drawn with the hoof complete, but it only measured a quarter of the length of the goose.

Guides and donkey-boys and boatmen still manage to exist somehow, and seize on the few visitors to Assouan. But the most persistent people are the vendors of beads and Soudanese curios. The famine of plutocrats has probably resulted in a lowering of prices. For a sovereign I could have acquired quite a handful of strange spears and daggers that were certainly genuine, or, as an alternative, a whole collection of musical instruments, baskets, bead necklaces, and similar authentic rubbish. Besides these curios, there is a brisk trade in horsehair or grass fly-whisks with ornamental bead handles. When I first visited Luxor it was a revelation to me to see choleric Colonels with purple faces carrying fly-whisks in public places. As time wore on, and the flies increased, it was no rare event to see a General on his inspection-rounds similarly armed. Eventually I followed suit myself, on being presented with a leather fly-killer by a West Indian medical who specialised in such implements. At Luxor, too, I first saw little children whose faces were literally covered with flies. No wonder that ophthalmia is prevalent in Upper Egypt!

When I visited Assouan at the end of 1917, two of the hotels were open for the winter season, and a crowd of six visitors thronged the streets and the river. The crowd had dwindled to one by the day of my departure. Yet the hotel where I stayed

was in full working order; great bowls of roses were placed in the bedrooms each day, and an ample complement of servants ministered to our wants. This seemed to me to be the best-appointed and best-managed hotel that I had ever patronised; and if it is to be taken as a criterion, the larger and more palatial houses that are at present closed must be luxurious indeed. The art of hotel-keeping would seem to reach its zenith in Assouan, where only the most opulent of the world's tourists ever penetrate.

When one has seen the beautiful surroundings of the town, the ruins of Elephantiné, the tombs, the Nilometer, Kitchener's Island, the Bisharen village, and the great Dam, one usually spends a day in the beautiful island-temples at Philæ. And mention of this temple reminds me that in this discursive chapter nothing has been said of the principal feature of Upper Egypt, its ancient art. This apparent omission has been intentional. No critique, however slight, of such a subject could be attempted in a volume of this kind.

But instead I will conclude with a few extracts from a recent book that has helped me more than any other to imagine the spirit that originated and permeated these huge buildings. In "The Works of Man," the late Mr. March Phillipps endeavoured to find in each of the great styles or periods of art a reflection of the life of the people who produced them. In the first two chapters he attributes the design of "The Temples of Egypt" to "The Tyranny of the Nile." He begins by denying that comparison between the art of the Egyptians and the Greeks is even possible, seeing that Greek art is essentially scholarly and intellectual, whereas in the architecture of the ancient Egyptians there was nothing of the sort:

> ". . . Its massiveness was a triumph of matter over mind, and its power the power of blind routine. . . . Like all intensely materialistic races, the Egyptians were immensely impressed by mere bulk and extent. It was in the knowledge how to animate that bulk with an intellectual expression that they failed, and in this respect the most characteristic of all their productions is, no doubt, the Pyramids. It would probably not be possible to find on the earth's surface buildings so vast yet so vacant of expression of any kind. . . .

". . . A uniform, solid triangle of masonry, mechanically accurate and utterly expressionless in its dead monotony, without any intelligible purpose, as is now admitted, save the stupid and ignoble one of hiding a wretched corpse within its bowels—that, I believe, is an architectural phenomenon absolutely without a parallel. . . .

". . . Mr. Hichens, and still more M. Loti, have distilled from the Sphinx by moonlight emotions to which I cannot here attempt to do justice. But how much of their emotion is found and how much brought? Sentimental and imaginative people will always incline probably to see in the vacancy of the Sphinx's expression a reflex of the *vide et néant* which lies on the other side of knowledge. But the difference between knowing that there is nothing to know and knowing nothing may be lost sight of. There is a *vide et néant* on this side of knowledge as well as on the other. Has the Sphinx finished thinking, or has it, perhaps, not begun to think? . . .

". . . The emptiness of the Sphinx's face is a prevailing trait in all Egyptian sculpture. All Egyptian faces stare before them with the same blank regard, which can be made to mean anything precisely because it means nothing. . . ."

The theory is developed in detail. It is pointed out that the ordered magnificence of the temple-plan is no more than a series of accidental accretions by successive builders; that the forms of the numerous columns are æsthetically unsatisfactory because structurally unsound; that the sculptured reliefs, though admirably drawn and carved, are lacking in expression and soul; that as the centuries rolled on no progress was made; and that in Egyptian religion, with its primitive worship of beasts, as in the dull and diffuse literature, the same intellectual atrophy appeared.

"It will be seen, then, that the grasp in which Egyptian art is held—the iron grasp of an immemorial usage—is a grasp which also controls Egyptian life in all its activities. It is a strange and weird spectacle, this spectacle of perpetual childhood, of the primitive, pot-hook stage, not developing, but everlastingly repeating itself. . . .

"... The reader ... has two courses open to him. He may, if he chooses, acclaim Egyptian art for its æsthetic attainments. He may persuade himself that he finds in the sausage-shaped columns and squat entablatures of its temples, and in the impossible conventions that do duty for human figures, all the lofty and noble ideas which are bodied forth in Greek architecture and sculpture. He may celebrate the great principles of harmony, unity, symmetry, so difficult to attain to, and which are, as it were, the very fruit of intellect and its gifts to art, which, he will tell us, he detects in the forms and proportions of Egyptian columns. But having begun thus, he will have to keep it up. Art is a standard of life, and will insist on applying itself. Whatever interpretation he gives it, he will be forced into expecting the equivalent from life. Inevitably, if he starts by talking about the harmony and unity of Egyptian architecture, he will be led on into applauding the intellectual achievements and exalted civilisation of a race which worshipped monkeys and snakes and never got beyond two in the multiplication table. . . ."

Or, on the other hand, the reader may judge Egyptian art as an expression of the life of the Egyptian people, and seek for an explanation of its spirit in the monotonous routine of agriculture and climate that characterises the valley of the Nile, typified in the primitive *shadoof* that has never been altered or improved for thousands of years.

"Along the banks of the Nile stand at intervals, like confessionals, the great temples in which Egypt has embodied its most secret thoughts and aspirations. Let us enter one for a last moment. The influence of the river pervades the building. Throngs of ponderous columns bulge upwards out of the lotus calyxes to terminate in the heavy buds or open blossoms of the sacred river flower. Again and again the same buds and blossoms appear. They are held in the hands of sculptured figures and nod over the foreheads of gods and goddesses. Fringes are formed of their stalks and heads, and bands of ornament composed of lotuses enrich the walls. But most of all it is the groves of huge shafts,

distended, ill-proportioned, outraging every rational law of the evolution of structural form—most of all it is these imposing representations of the Nile's emblem which are responsible for the character of the whole interior. These huge obese features may be offensive to all our notions of structural propriety, but they were never invented to express a structural purpose. They were invented to express the ruling sentiment of Egypt—adoration of the Nile. It is difficult to convey to one who has not felt their presence the influence of the river which exudes from their dense-growing groves of bulbs—for they are more bulbs than shafts. All the feeling we associate with swamps and marshes, with sleepy, lapping water, with the succulent, rank growth of reeds and sedges, inhabits these dim interiors. The influence which dominates Egypt is, in the Egyptian temple, focussed and concentrated. All other considerations, all the ideals pertaining to a structural art, are discarded, that the presence and the power of the river may receive complete embodiment. . . .

". . . Nothing, it seemed, could ever intrude here to break the reigning routine or disturb the unvarying iteration of the months."

By these short extracts from a fascinating book I have endeavoured to outline a theory expounded in eighty pages of print. But it appears to me that most of us do not compare the art of Egypt and of Greece on equal terms. We realise that the former preceded the latter by many centuries, and we make allowances for a certain archaism in architectural and sculptural forms. Regarded thus, the temples of Egypt have a monumental grandeur of plan that is surely intentional. And the theory of the lotus can be carried too far. Perhaps there is such a complaint as lotophobia. Then the Ptolemaic period, which contributed so much to the temples of the Nile, is never mentioned. In the buildings of that age much of Greek refinement is brought to bear on the older forms of Egyptian art, and in the result many of Mr. March Phillipps' pet aversions no longer find a place.

Lastly, it is possible to talk too much of the immutability of life in the valley of the Nile. Our Army in Sinai was not fight-

ing for the temples of Thebes, but for one of the most valuable territories in the world—for a country that has untold possibilities. The traveller who journeys to Luxor or to Assouan does well to study the achievements of bygone days, but he must be blind indeed if he has not seen great factories springing up all through Upper Egypt, that are changing the face of this unchangeable land at last.

CHAPTER XI

THE OLDEST ROAD IN THE WORLD

WHEN the ancient Kings of Egypt and Assyria led their hosts against each other across the desert of Northern Sinai, the aspect of that inhospitable land must have been very much what it was when our modern Army slowly traversed it in 1916. Even allowing for the lapse of thousands of years, this weary waste of sand can never have been pasture or garden. The only events that have altered the conditions of travel in all these centuries are of recent date—the opening of the Suez Canal nearly fifty years ago, and of the new military railway to Palestine in 1916-17. When Kinglake wrote his famous chapters in "Eothen," describing the journey from Gaza to Cairo on camel-back, his experiences were almost exactly those which must have befallen Abraham or the Holy Family.

It is difficult to picture the eastern frontier of Egypt without the Suez Canal. That great maritime thoroughfare cut across Lake Menzaleh and Lake Ballah, thus leaving on its east side a detached shallow lagoon in each case. But in olden days the Nile itself ran through different channels. Its western arm flowed into the sea somewhere near the modern Aboukir. Its eastern arm had its mouth about halfway between Port Said and the modern camp at Mahamdiya. Near this "Pelusiac" mouth, on the level plain near the seashore, lay the famous city of Pelusium, and farther inland, on the edge of the present Lake Menzaleh, lay another great town, Tanis. Round Zagazig, Abu Hammad, and Bilbeis, even now the most fertile district of all the Delta, was the Land of Goshen. Its limits are not exactly defined. It must have included Bubastis, near Zagazig, a city sacred to the worship of cats, as Crocodilopolis was to crocodiles and Memphis to bulls. It probably stretched along the Pelusiac arm of the Nile to Salhia, whence pilgrims formerly set out across

the desert to Palestine. And a strip of cultivated land must have extended nearly to Ismailia, for the ruins of Pithom—one of the store-cities mentioned in the Bible—are still to be seen there, near the railway-station of Masameh, bearing the Arab name of Tell-el-Maskhuta. The other store-city, Ramses, may have stood where now we see the great sandy hill of Tell-el-Kebir, familiar in modern history as the scene of a British victory in 1882, and during the present war as the site of the largest camp in all Egypt. Even so long ago as the Middle Empire, two thousand years or so B.C., a canal was constructed towards Lake Timsah from the Nile Valley, and a King named Necho (609-593 B.C.) extended it from Lake Timsah towards Suez. According to Herodotus, 120,000 labourers perished during the work, and the King was warned by an oracle to abandon it. It was subsequently completed by the Persians, who left monuments near the camp at Serapeum, and by the Ptolemies.

To picture the Egyptian end of the old highway, one must therefore blot out all memories of Port Said or the Suez Canal, for the latter draws a hard line across lagoon and desert where no such line existed up to fifty years ago.

The list of Kings, of warriors, and of travellers who have crossed the hundred miles of wilderness from Egypt to El Arish would include a large number of the outstanding figures in ancient and Biblical history. But a few of the experiences of some of the most unfamiliar may be recalled.

Father Abraham "went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen. xii. 10)—simply that and nothing more. Nobody knows how or when or where. But when he returned to Southern Palestine, probably using this old trail, he "was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. xiii. 2).

Then comes the story of Joseph, who was "sold into Egypt" (Gen. xxxvii. 36), and thus commenced what is perhaps the most interesting career in Old Testament history. The scholars have never yet made up their minds as to when these incidents occurred, and the theory that Rameses II., Egypt's greatest King and greatest builder, was the Pharaoh of the Oppression is still open to doubt. This much, however, is tolerably certain: that the Israelites settled in the Land of Goshen, between Zagazig, Abu Hammad, and Bilbeis; that they "built for Pharaoh

treasure-cities, Pithom and Ramses" (Exod. i. 11) between Zagazig and Ismailia; and that, finally, they set forth from this Land of Goshen for their great journey across the Wilderness.

Not very long ago it was generally believed that the route taken by the Israelites ran from Goshen along the Wadi Tumilat, turned south near Lake Timsah, crossed the Bitter Lakes (then perhaps a part of the Gulf of Suez and thus of the Red Sea), skirted the east side of the Gulf of Suez, passed Marah and Elim, ascended over the stony hills to Mount Sinai, and, lastly, turned north to a place known as Kadesh, or Kadesh-barnea, in the south of Palestine. This is the view upheld by Dean Stanley and many Biblical authorities. For centuries it has drawn pilgrims to the ancient monastery of St. Catherine, near Mount Sinai, and in every Bible atlas it has been adopted. But this is an age of progress, even of iconoclasm, and a completely new theory has been evolved. It is now suggested by Sir William Willcocks, the irrigation expert, by Professor Sayce, and by other eminent talkers and writers, that the claims of Southern Sinai are a myth, manufactured by the monks in the Dark Ages for obvious reasons. Professor Sayce writes:

> "Since the third or fourth centuries of the Christian era, the Sinaitic Peninsula has been assumed to be the scene of the wanderings in the desert. The belief originated in the communities of hermits who took refuge there, partly to escape persecution, partly from a desire to quit the worldly life of the Egyptian cities. . . . But there is a historical reason which makes it impossible for us to believe that the western side of the Sinaitic peninsula could have witnessed the giving of the Law and the wanderings of the Israelitish people. In the days of the Exodus it was an Egyptian province, garrisoned by Egyptian soldiers, who protected the officials and workmen at the mines of copper and malachite. The great Harris Papyrus tells us how Pharaoh sent thither rich presents for the temple of the goddess Hathor. To have gone there would have been, not only to return to Egypt, but to an Egypt more strictly garrisoned and more hostile to the wandering tribes of Asia than the Delta itself."

Sir William Willcocks is strongly of opinion that the Israelites took the very same route across the Northern Sinai as that followed by Desert Column in 1916. He is no half-hearted apologist, and is quite convinced as to his geography at every stage of the long march. He abandons the Red Sea idea at the outset, placing the scene of the disaster to Pharaoh's army at a point between Salhia and Kantara, where there was originally the Pelusiac arm of the Nile, now known as the Bahr-el-Baggar. He then sends the Israelites off to Marah and to Elim, bringing them back to the neighbourhood of Pelusium or Mahamdiya in time for the quail season in September.

> "It was probably in October, after the first fall of rain, that they left Egypt for good and started on their journey through the Wilderness of Sin, which lay immediately south of the Mediterranean Sea. It is evident from many passages in the Bible that in those times the name of Goshen was applied not only to the Wady Tumilat west of Ismailia, but also to the country lying between El Arish and Beersheba. Some sound scholars consider that during their 400 years' stay in Egypt the Israelites overflowed eastwards and occupied the wilderness between the Wady Tumilat and Beersheba up to the Mediterranean. They shared this wilderness with the Amalekites, who were there before them, and they gave the name of Goshen among themselves to the whole country from the border of Egypt to the wells of Beersheba. If this were so, it would be only natural for the Israelites on leaving Egypt to travel through their own settlements south of the Mediterranean. Moreover, they were forced to keep close to the Mediterranean to secure pastures for their cattle and sheep until they reached Alush (in all probability El Arish), at the mouth of the Wady of Egypt, and the recognised frontier of Egyptian territory proper for thousands of years. At El Arish they had to turn aside from the road of the Philistines, which went up to Gaza, through fear of the Philistines or the Canaanites."

Sir William Willcocks then proceeds to identify Rephidim with the modern Maghdaba, the scene of the battle with the Turks at Christmas, 1916, and Kadesh Barnea with Ain Kadis near

Kossaima, close to the frontier between Palestine and Egypt. Last of all, he recognises a new Sinai and Horeb, less than half the height of the great mountain group that has borne the name through so many centuries.

Another authority, Dr. Brugsch, goes still farther north. He considers that the Israelites started from Zoan (Tanis), which he identifies with Ramses, and proceeded thence across the district of Succoth (between Tanis and Pelusium) to Migdol (twelve miles from Pelusium), thence to Baal-Zephon (Mount Casius on the sea-coast, north of Bir-el-Abd). But the most startling part of his theory is that he makes the refugees march along the narrow strip of land between the Mediterranean and Lake Bardawil. The latter, known to the ancients as the "Serbonian Bog," he identifies with the "Red Sea" (*yam suph* = sea of weeds) crossed by the Israelites. Major-General Tulloch relates that he once saw the waters of Lake Menzaleh, near the entrance to the Suez Canal, driven back seven miles by a violent east wind, and thus offers an explanation of a puzzling part of the story.

With the value of these learned and various speculations this little book can have no concern. It is sufficient to know that there are some people who would place the scene of the Exodus in the country that we got to know so well in 1916 and 1917. For my part, I am content to follow the band, and if Fortune permitted me to make a pilgrimage to the Mount Sinai that Baedeker and the Victorians and the Crusaders have familiarised, I should burn my modest votive candle there rather than on some new-fangled hillock near Kossaima.

On the outer walls of the Hypostyle Hall in the great temple at Karnak in Upper Egypt there are a number of remarkable reliefs, depicting the victories of Sethos I. and Rameses II. over the Bedouins of Southern Palestine and other enemies. During these wars, between *circa* 1300 and 1200 B.C., there must have been a constant movement of armies across Sinai, and they would almost certainly follow the old road through Katia and El Arish, where the best water-supply is to be found.

In all the accounts of the campaigns in this district, one reads certain names again and again. Of these, perhaps Gaza is the most often mentioned; Bilbeis and El Arish appear frequently,

but, with the possible exception of Gaza, Pelusium seems to have been the favourite *terrain* for the chief battles. It is now commemorated in the name of a station on the new railway to Palestine, but its ruins lie some miles to the north, under and around the mounds of *Tell Farama* and *Tell-el-Fadda*. Only the barest fragments of architecture are now to be seen.

It commanded the caravan route through Salhia into the Delta, and stood only a few miles from the Pelusiac arm of the Nile. Near it was a small fort, Dafannah or Daphnæ. At the beginning of the seventh century B.C. it was attacked by Sennacherib, King of Assyria, but he eventually retreated, and his story has become celebrated through a famous poem. ' In 670 B.C. his son Esarhaddon took the place. We hear of Pelusium again during the invasion of Cambyses, 150 years or so later. The story of the campaign is related by Herodotus (III. 5-12).

The next important battle at Pelusium was in 171 B.C., when Antiochus IV. of Syria defeated Ptolemy Philometor there. It was the scene of the murder of Pompey, when he fled to Egypt after the battle of Pharsalia. When the Arabs came to invade Egypt in A.D. 640 they attacked Pelusium with a force of some 8,000 men under the General Amr-ibn-al-Asi, and defeated the garrison in less than a month. Early in the twelfth century the city was burned by the Crusaders under Baldwin, King of Jerusalem.

The following is Sir Walter Besant's description, in his "History of Jerusalem," of King Baldwin's expedition:

> ". . . He turned his thoughts to the conquest of Egypt, and actually set off to accomplish this with an army of one hundred and sixteen knights and four hundred foot soldiers. They penetrated as far as Pharamia, near the ancient Pelusium, which the inhabitants abandoned in a panic. They found here food and drink in plenty, and rested for two whole days. On the third, certain of the more prudent came to Baldwin: 'We are few in number,' they said; 'our arrival is known in all the country; it is only three days' march from here to Cairo. Let us therefore take counsel how best to get out of the place.
>
> "The King, seeing the wisdom of this advice, ordered

the walls to be thrown down, and all the houses of the town to be set on fire. But whether it was the heat of the day or the effect of over-exertion, he felt in the evening violent pains, which increased hourly. To be sick in the East was then to be on the point of death, and despairing of recovery, he sent for his chiefs, and acquainted them of the certainty of his end. All burst into tears and lamentations—quite selfishly, it would seem, and on their own accounts, 'for no one had any hope, from that moment, of ever seeing Jerusalem again.' Then the King raised himself and spoke to them, despite his sufferings, 'Why, my brothers and companions in arms, should the death of a single man strike down your hearts and oppress you with feebleness in this land of pilgrimage, and in the midst of our enemies? Remember, in the name of God, that there are many among you whose strength is as great or greater than mine. Quit yourselves, then, like men, and advise the means of returning sword in hand, and maintaining the kingdom of Jerusalem according to your oaths.' And then, as if for a last prayer, he implored them not to bury his body in the land of the stranger, but to take it to Jerusalem, and lay it beside his brother Godfrey. His soldiers burst into tears. How could they carry, in the heat of the summer, his body so far?' But the King sent for Odo, his cook. 'Know,' he said, 'that I am about to die. If you have loved me in health, preserve your fidelity in death. Open my body as soon as the breath is out of it, fill me with salt and spice, and bear me to Jerusalem, to be buried in the forms of the Church.'

"They bore him along, still living. On the third day of the week the end came, and Baldwin died. With his last breath he named his brother Eustace as his successor; but if he would not take the crown, he gave them liberty to choose any other. Odo, the cook, executed his wishes; his bowels were buried at El Arish, and the little army, in sadness and with misgivings of evil, returned to Jerusalem, bringing with them the King who had so often led them to victory."

Such was the chequered career of Pelusium, since Old Testament days, when it was known by the name of Sin. In Ezekiel xxx. 15

we read : "And I will pour my fury upon Sin, the strength of Egypt."

Mr. Reynolds Ball, in his book "The City of the Caliphs," states that—

> ". . . along the shore may still be traced a few vestiges of the great highway—the oldest road in the world of which remains exist—constructed by Rameses the Great in 1350 B.C., when he undertook his expedition for the conquest of Syria.

Lack of time while I was stationed in this part of Sinai prevented me from visiting Pelusium, but, although it was a favourite haunt of brass-hatted souvenir-hunters, I am informed that little remains to indicate its former greatness.

Another famous conqueror whose army trod this old road was Napoleon. His expedition was organised in Egypt in 1798, and it is interesting to compare its composition and achievements with those of our Desert Column in 1916-17. The force detailed for Syria numbered in all 13,150 men, of whom 10,000 were infantry, 800 cavalry, 1,600 artillery, and the remainder non-combatants and guides. The infantry was formed into four *petits divisions*, each of which was therefore much smaller than a modern infantry brigade. These "divisions" were commanded by Generals Kleber, Reynier, Bon, and Lannes. One of the Brigadiers was Junot, and the cavalry, artillery, and engineers were commanded by Murat, Dommartin, and Caffarelli respectively. Many of these names became household words in later years, but to modern eyes the proportion of Generals seems unduly generous, one to less than a thousand men! Possibly a General was neither so awe-inspiring nor so expensive in those primitive days. The whole army was furnished with 52 guns, of which 36 were field-guns. Siege artillery, comprising 12 heavier guns, was embarked from Damietta, as it was considered impossible to drag it over the sand.

Napoleon's army was equipped with camel transport. Three thousand camels and a similar number of donkeys were employed to carry rations, water, and baggage, distributed as follows: 1,000 camels to carry rations for 14,000 men for fifteen days, also

for 3,000 artillery, engineers, and cavalry horses; and 2,000 camels to carry three days' water-supply, this being the time estimated for traversing the comparatively waterless tract between Katia and El Arish. The allowance of donkeys was one to every ten infantrymen, thus permitting 15 pounds of baggage to be carried by each soldier. In the history of the expedition by Lacroix, the only one accessible to me under present conditions, nothing is said as to camels for carrying ammunition. The ammunition camels of our Desert Column must have numbered thousands, for the 300 pounds that constitutes the standard load would not permit of many large shells per animal.

Garrisons were left behind in Cairo, Damietta, or Rosetta; also a small army in Upper Egypt. Naval co-operation was arranged, a fleet with heavy guns being left in the harbour at Alexandria to await orders. On December 20, 1798, Abd-Allah, the Turkish General under Djezzar, was encamped at Gaza with an army of 12,000 men. On January 2, 1799, he occupied El Arish with 4,000 men. General Reynier, who had hitherto occupied Katia as an outpost, advanced his own headquarters from Salhia to Katia on February 5. The following day he set out for El Arish, and arrived at *Mesoudyah* (the modern *Masaid*), close to that town, in two days! His subsequent doings are best considered in the next chapter, but meanwhile we may see how the other "divisions" were faring.

Kleber's division embarked at Damietta on Lake Menzaleh, and landed at the fort of Tina, close to the ruins of Pelusium. They left there on February 6, and pressed on to El Arish, arriving there on the 12th. Bonaparte himself had only just returned from Cairo to his headquarters at Bilbeis when a rider brought him a despatch from Reynier at Masaid, leading him to believe that the position there was serious. "He mounted his camel, rode all night, stayed at Katia on the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th, to arrange his itinerary and commissariat, *then arrived before El Arish on the 17th*, and installed his headquarters there!" This sentence, translated from Lacroix, is astounding to anyone who has traversed the same route, and thus realises that Napoleon's one day's march from Katia to El Arish measured between 60 and 70 miles.

The remaining divisions under Bon and Lannes, and the

parcs de réserve—presumably what we euphoniously call "the dumps"—rested on February 12 at Salhia, on the 13th at El A'ras (south of Dueidar), on the 14th at Katia, on the 15th at Bir-el-Abd, on the 16th at Birket A'ych, on the 17th at Mesoudyah (Masaid), and arrived at El Arish on February 18, 19, and 20.

Four months later—after fighting at El Arish, Gaza, and many places farther north—the army returned. They left El Arish on June 2, and encamped at Katia two days later. The following day Bonaparte visited Tina and Pelusium, strolling along the seashore where Pompey was assasinated. The heat was oppressive, and after having walked round the ancient wall of the city, he rested under the welcome shade of an old triumphal arch. On the 17th the army arrived at Salhia, thankful for unlimited water and the ample shade of palm-groves, after nine days of burning heat and terrible thirst across the sands of Sinai. Owing to shortage of transport, Napoleon himself had set the noble example of marching on foot.

When the roll was called at Salhia, only 11,133 men responded. Of the 2,000 who had thus disappeared since the expedition set out, 500 had been killed in the field, 700 had died in hospital, 600 had been left behind as garrisons at El Arish and Katia, and 200 had already left Salhia as an advance-party. Of the 11,000 odd who answered the roll, 1,500 were wounded, but 1,200 of these rejoined the army before the battle of Aboukir. The total casualties in Napoleon's expedition, according to Lacroix, thus amounted in all to 1,400 dead and 85 presumably disabled. Comparisons with our own expedition are inevitable, but one realises how the scale of war has altered when a force numbering more than ten times Napoleon's famous Syrian army is passed over by the armchair people in England as a "side-show."

Turning aside for a moment from the dreary chronicles of war, it is interesting to see what the author of "Eothen" makes of Northern Sinai. Some time in the spacious early days of Queen Victoria's reign, Kinglake set out from Gaza for Egypt. He travelled on camel-back, and his descriptions of the ways of camels are among the most interesting passages in this part of his book. When he started across Sinai he grumbled at the green pastures of Sheikh Zuweid and Rafa, because they separated him from the desert which he longed to traverse. But when he

reached that unpleasant tract of nothingness, his ideas underwent a noticeable change:

"In passing the Desert you will find your Arabs wanting to start and to rest at all sorts of odd times; they like, for instance, to be off at one in the morning, and to rest during the whole of the afternoon. You must not give way to their wishes in this respect: I tried their plan once and found it very harassing and unwholesome. An ordinary tent can give you very little protection against heat, for the fire strikes fiercely through single canvas, and you soon find that whilst you lie crouching and striving to hide yourself from the blazing face of the sun, his power is harder to bear than it is where you boldly defy him from the airy heights of your camel. . . .

"The manner of my daily march was this. At about an hour before dawn, I rose and made the most of about a pint of water which I allowed myself for washing. Then I breakfasted upon tea and bread. As soon as the beasts were loaded I mounted my camel and pressed forward. My poor Arabs, being on foot, would sometimes moan with fatigue and pray for rest; but I was anxious to enable them to perform their contract for bringing me to Cairo within the stipulated time, and I did not therefore allow a halt until the evening came. . . .

"As long as you are journeying in the interior of the Desert you have no particular point to make for as your resting-place. The endless sands yield nothing but small stunted shrubs; even these fail after the first two or three days, and from that time you pass over broad plains—you pass over newly reared hills—you pass through valleys dug out by the last week's storm—and the hills and the valleys are sand, sand, sand, still sand, and only sand, and sand, and sand again. The earth is so samely that your eyes turn towards heaven—towards heaven, I mean, in the sense of sky. You look to the sun, for he is your taskmaster, and by him you know the measure of the work that you have done, and the measure of the work that remains for you to do. He comes when you strike your tent in the early morning,

and then for the first hour of the day, as you move forward on your camel, he stands at your near side, and makes you know that the whole day's toil is before you; then for a while, and a long while, you see him no more, for you are veiled and shrouded, and dare not look upon the greatness of his glory, but you know where he strides overhead by the touch of his flaming sword. No words are spoken, but your Arabs moan, your camels sigh, your skin glows, your shoulders ache, and for sights you see the pattern and the web of the silk that veils your eyes and the glare of the outer light. Time labours on—your skin glows, your shoulders ache, your Arabs moan, your camels sigh, and you see the same pattern in the silk and the same glare of light beyond; but conquering Time marches on, and by-and-by the descending sun has compassed the heaven, and now softly touches your right arm, and throws your lank shadow over the sand right along on the way for Persia. Then again you look upon his face, for his power is all veiled in his beauty, and the redness of flames has become the redness of roses; the fair, wavy cloud that fled in the morning now comes to his sight once more—comes blushing, yet still comes on—comes burning with blushes, yet comes and clings to his side.

"Then begins your season of rest. The world about you is all your own, and there, where you will, you pitch your solitary tent; there is no living thing to dispute your choice. When at last the spot had been fixed upon and we came to a halt, one of the Arabs would touch the chest of my camel, and utter at the same time a peculiar gurgling sound. The beast instantly understood and obeyed the sign, and slowly sunk under me, till she brought her body to a level with the ground; then gladly enough I alighted. The rest of the camels were unloaded and turned loose to browse upon the shrubs of the Desert, where shrubs there were, or where these failed, to wait for the small quantity of food that was allowed them out of our stores."

There are many things in Kinglake's vivid account of his journey that we saw little of as we passed over the same ground

some seventy years later. The Bedouins, such as he met, had all dispersed as our advanced divisions fought their way to El Arish, the jackals were less often heard at nights, and the timid tourists at whom he jeered were long ago forbidden to pass over to the east side of the Canal, had they even wished to do so. But his impressions of burning heat and weary days are still true. The troops of Desert Column struggled over the heavy sand on foot, carrying all their cumbersome equipment on their backs. They marched as much as twelve miles in a day. They had no tents to shelter them from the blinding glare of midday, from the torrents of rain that fell in December and January, or from the bitter cold of winter nights. They passed on, as our Tommies always do, with that curious mixture of phlegm and blasphemy that is their universal characteristic, and when in February, 1917, they emerged at last among the gay flowers and green cornfields of the Palestine border, they welcomed the change as only desert-sick travellers could.

I write this last paragraph with the utmost freedom, because I can claim no share in the credit myself. We all knew what those long marches involved, and many of my own men joined in them, but I myself passed over all this ground by train until I reached El Arish, when the stiffest part of the *trek* was over. Divisions who came up from Kantara in the wake of Desert Column were saved many of the hardships of the march, for a "road" of wire-netting had been laid over the whole distance wherever the sand was heavy and the "going" difficult.

El Kantara was not, is not, and never has been a nice place. The name means, in Arabic, "the Bridge"—that is to say, the neck of land over which caravans and pilgrims passed from Salhia and Egypt towards Katia and Palestine. But in modern times it has become more than ever a bridge. All the personnel, the munitions of war, the animals, and the food that a large army requires, have crossed the Canal here in increasing numbers for the past year and a half. Here everything and everybody, including, unfortunately, all sick and wounded, have to be transferred from trains to road-transport, and then again to trains. The one thing that the place needs above all is a bridge in fact as well as in name, a swing bridge of steel that would connect the two stations. Before the war, Kantara consisted of a handful

of houses, some of them with architectural pretensions, others merely mud huts. There was a small mosque of no particular interest, a group of yellow buildings belonging to the Canal administration, the railway-station, and a clump of trees. The country all round it is a dead level of sand. The remains of the Greek outpost Daphnæ (the *Tahapanes, Tahpanes,* or *Tehaphnehes* of the Bible) lie beneath the mounds of *Tell-el-Daffaneh* (Hill of the Grave-diggers) on the caravan route to Salhia; and one and a half miles east of Kantara, near the new railway, are ruins, of the period of Rameses II. and of later rulers, in the hill known to-day as *Tell Abu-Seifeh.* Illustrations of the fort at Daphnæ are given in Professor Flinders Petrie's "Egypt and Israel," a recent book.

But Kantara as I first saw it then, and as I next saw it at midsummer, 1917, was a wilderness of tents and military "dumps," as hideous as a great military base without any dilution of civilian life is bound to be. Here were left all the surplus belongings of Desert Column, here were sorted all the drafts from England and all the patients from hospital; here were repaired all the appliances that an army needs—from wrist watches to G.S. wagons. Acres of marquees full of officers' luxuries and soldiers' kit-bags stretched away over the desert. Kantara had become a bridge in more senses than one, the bridge between the desert and civilisation. On the east was nothing but sand and soldiers. On the west was a real live railway-station with a bookstall, where one could climb into a real live railway-carriage or a real dining-car. There might even be women and children on the train, to say nothing of indispensable civilians in Trilby hats. And, over on the west of the Canal there, one came to Egypt, with its unlimited water and bright green fields.

Going eastwards, on the other hand, was always depressing for any but the most bloodthirsty, and the outlook that December afternoon was hardly romantic, though there was a certain glamour in the consciousness that one was about to make one's acquaintance with something mildly approximating to active-service conditions. My first impression of our *trek* was one of utter and overwhelming chaos. This was no doubt the illusion of a civilian, of a "fresher" to the job. An army on the move

must always look chaotic, and, indeed, looks far more chaotic than it is. In the case of my own division, our sight was probably affected by a surfeit of eye-wash on the Canal.

When we arrived at Kantara West Station, in the early afternoon, we found it chock-full of trains and bits of trains, and the long platform was packed from end to end with the motley gear of divisional headquarters.

Many of the men settled down on the top of their heaps of baggage in the trucks, prepared for a cold and uncomfortable night. Others sang and yelled round camp-fires they had made near the platform. A gunner officer and myself curled up on a tarpaulin in the bottom of a truck, and very soon the rest of the floor was a mass of legs and snoring heads and boots and webbing equipment and rifles and mess-tins.

At 3 a.m. the train moved off. I envied the stertorous crowd around me and my fat gunner friend, all of whom slept like tops so far as I could see. The train rattled and jolted over a featureless desert. It was bitterly cold. At 5 a.m. we stopped, for no apparent reason. This was Romani! I woke up my men, and we heaved all our clumsy belongings on to the ground just where we were. My shivering groom walked my horse up and down. In the darkness we could see nothing but crowds of huddled-up men, sleeping amid mounds of baggage. As day broke we found that there was a station of sorts quite near us—that is to say, a platform and a siding. We were then ordered to move all our stuff away from the railway-line to a spot a few yards off.

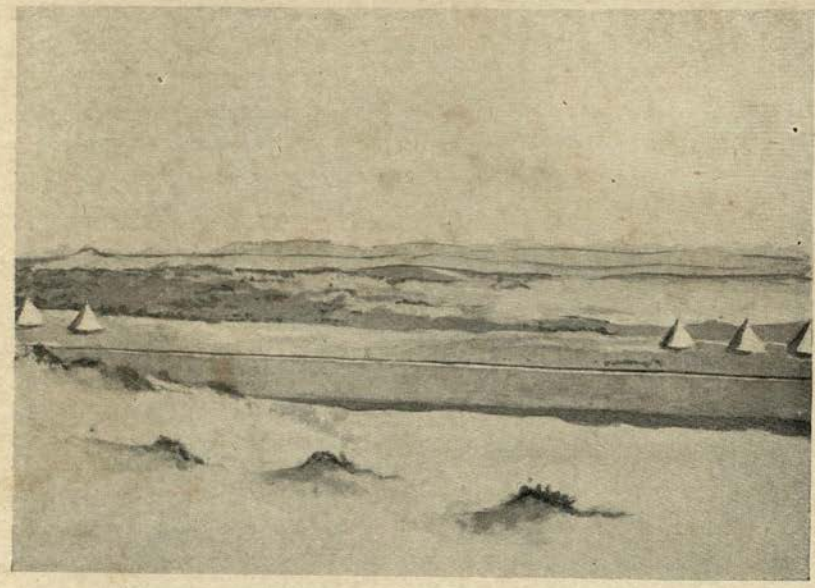
Romani Station that day, and for several days afterwards, was an extraordinary sight. On the damp level ground adjoining the lines were rows of little square enclosures, made of kit-bags, boxes, and other gear, inside each of which half a dozen or more men were living and working and sleeping and eating until further orders arrived.

I was fortunate enough to escape from this mêlée during the day of our arrival, and we pitched out tents on a flat site close to the station. Romani was at that time the most straggling and disorderly camp that I had ever seen. This was partly due to the contours and nature of the ground. The central area of the camp consisted of *sabkhet*, or dark-coloured dry sandy marsh, liable to inundation during heavy rain, and dead level. From

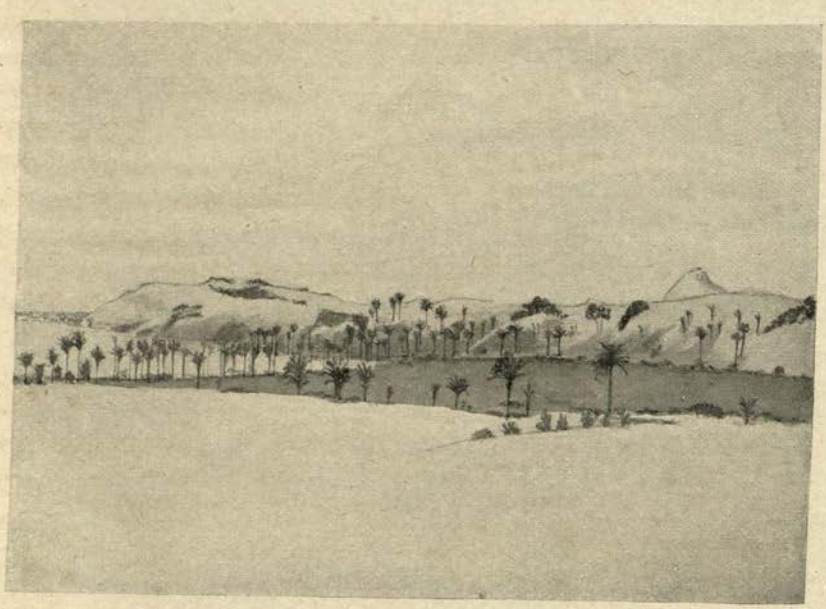
this irregular patch, on which the station lay, rose steep sand-dunes. The railway had arrived there during the summer, and in August the carefully planned Turkish expedition that was intended to invade Egypt had come to grief there, after preliminary successes in the neighbourhood. On the south side of the *sabkhet*, among small palm-grooves or *hods*, were the dumps of the two British infantry divisions in advance of us, where all superfluous baggage and equipment, personal or otherwise, was deposited as its owners moved forward as part of Desert Column. As explained in Chapter V., my own division had been subjected to a preliminary weeding-out of gear when leaving the Canal, but the process was again repeated at Romani, and we added another dump in line with those already existing. Each unit had one or more marquees according to its size, and in these marquees all kit-bags, officers' camp furniture, and so on, were stacked under the care of a small detachment of lame ducks from the unit, with an officer, who was disabled in some way, over them. These men had few duties beyond keeping themselves clean and periodically airing the whole of the kit-bags under their charge. During the spring of 1917 these dumps were moved down to Kantara.

The railway at Romani had made great strides since it arrived in the summer, but was still somewhat primitive. A newcomer was astonished to see L. and S.W.R. locomotives moving up and down the line as unconcernedly as if they were doing the journey from Clapham Junction to Vauxhall. When we arrived in December, Railhead had reached Mazar, fifty miles ahead of us, and stories kept arriving of "aerial activity" in that part of the world. The Turks were then in possession of El Arish. But though Romani had been bombed frequently in the summer, Fritz let us alone during our short sojourn there. The railway formed a link with the divisions ahead. Sick and wounded passed through on a white corridor-train bearing the red cross. The coaches of this train had no visible mark to indicate their origin, but they also had an air of the South-Western about them. In happier days one could imagine them packed with family parties bound from Waterloo to Weymouth or North Devon.

At Christmas-time the prisoners captured at El Arish and Maghdaba came down the line. They were a curious mixture, grey-clad Turks and wild-looking Bedouins. By far the most



THE MAGHARA HILLS FROM BIR-EL-MAZAR.



BIR-EL-ROMANI.

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attractive of them was a bandit I saw one night in a bunk on the hospital train. He was a picturesque scoundrel with a green skirt, a scarlet sash, and lustrous eyes more suited to the days of Haroun-al-Raschid than our own prosaic age. He should have worn a jewel in his turban and wielded a scimitar.

While we were at Romani, the construction of permanent station-buildings was proceeding, and when I passed through there again six months later they were finished, an ambitious affair of red tiles and grey walls. But in the meantime the camp had all melted away, and only palms and sand-dunes were visible from the platform where we halted. It was a great change from the dreary Christmas of 1916, which festive season found me alone in my marquee, for the adjoining ambulance with whom I had intended to celebrate it had rushed up the line a few days before to lend a hand in the operations at El Arish. The weather at this time was very un-Egyptian—stormy and cold. For several days we had violent thunder and lightning, accompanied by a deluge of rain. The *sabkhet* became a shallow lagoon, an inch or two deep in water. My own little camp was just clear of the water-logged ground, but only a few inches above it, and one result of the inundation was to reveal the unpleasant fact that a small refuse-pit existed just under the corner of my marquee, a relic of the last occupant of this desirable camping-ground.

Most of the units in Romani were, however, encamped on the slopes of the sand-dunes, thus securing a dry if shifting floor. Among them was a large camp of E.L.C., where the officers' tent was surrounded by an ornamental border of shells fired into the place from Turkish field-guns in the summer.

The redeeming feature of Romani was the series of little *hods* south of the railway. A *hod* is a miniature oasis, a small clump of palms, in a depression where water is usually to be found. Outside the barbed-wire perimeter was a very large *hod*, where the chief Roman wells that give the place its name are situated. They lay in a long line at the foot of a precipitous sand-dune, the palm-trees providing a certain amount of shade for travellers in the heat of summer.

By following this particular line of sand-dunes for a few miles beyond the perimeter, one comes to Katib Gannit. This was the best place round Romani for reviewing a wide extent of country,

and I set out with it as my objective on Christmas afternoon, having spent the morning very happily in sketching it from near the camp at Romani. After picking my way across one or two deep valleys formed in the ever-changing dunes, I dismounted on the shoulder of the hill, and left my horse with a friendly group of Yeomanry while I climbed to the steep summit. Katib Gannit is an extraordinary phenomenon. It is a sand-dune that changes its form with every gale of wind, and its long ridge has a knife-like edge. Yet it is marked on the map just like any permanent landmark, and its height—240 feet—is duly shown. It was strange to think that this and other neighbouring sand-hills were the scene of desperate hand-to-hand fighting a few months before.

The whole panorama lies spread out before you as you stand on the windy ridge of Katib Gannit. South-east of you stretches the great Oasis of Katia, with its thousands of palm-trees, where our troops sheltered from the sun and from Fritz's prying eyes during the first half of 1916. West of you the yellow sand-dunes merge into the blue distance of the Plain of Tina, where once Pelusium lay, and the railway winds through them towards Kantara and the Canal. Far beyond Katia the great cliffs of the Maghara range rise from the low hills around them. And on the north, beyond Romani, with its palms—and its huts and tents in those days—the horizon is formed by the long level line of the sea. It is a beautiful picture, full of variety in contour and colouring, especially beautiful, perhaps, when the mild atmosphere of winter softens the glare on the sand.

In the scrub-covered country that lies between Katib Gannit and the Katia Oasis there are no very startling objects of interest.

A pleasant ride, frequently necessitated for me in the course of my laborious duties, was from Romani to Mahamdiya, where divisional headquarters basked in the sunshine on a gentle slope by the sea. Though the green huts where they worked and fed, and the tents where, it is said, they occasionally rested, stood only a few feet above sea-level, they commanded a magnificent view of the great lagoon that stretched all the way to Port Said, which hung like a mirage city in the very sea, twenty miles away. Between Mahandiya and Port Said there was a small fort resem-

bling the Martello Towers of Kent and Sussex. This also appeared to rise out of the sea. And still farther to one's left, as one looked north-west from this little hill, a curious mound rose from the lagoon. My chief explained to me that it was a mirage, but as a matter of cold fact it was the ruins of Pelusium. In those days I did not believe in mirages, and, indeed, imagined that, as a teetotaller, I should never have the opportunity of seeing one, but a summer on the Libyan Desert has taught me otherwise.

Divisional headquarters was not, however, the only lure that drew me to Mahamdiya. Even at Christmas bathing was possible, and, except on the coldest days, enjoyable. But, like other places on this coast east of Port Said, Mahamdiya is not an ideal *plage* because of the currents that make it difficult to get back to shore. Once, too, I saw sharks swimming close to the beach. This was no mirage, but a fact corroborated by several unimpeachable authorities with red tabs who happened to be near me at the time, to say nothing of less important witnesses.

In their larger intervals of leisure the Staff rode over to Pelusium and scratched for souvenirs in the sand. When business at Mahamdiya was brisk, and intervals for relaxation less frequent, they trotted along the shore half a mile or so eastwards, and did yeoman work in the battered ruins of Gercha, or the Camp of Chambrias, as it is variously known. Of this ancient town little remains. There is some brick vaulting close to the waves, so close that they may well have washed some of it away. Coins and pottery were often found there by diligent toilers with an entrenching-tool. It always amused me to see a groom holding half a dozen glossy chargers on the beach while their owners so far forgot their icy reserve as to grovel in the débris, digging cheek by jowl with the common herd, in the hope of turning up a tear-bottle or an effigy of some Roman Emperor. On the cliffs above the ruins were other remains, fragments of worked stone and rifled tombs. Mr. Greville Chester identifies this site with the Pihahiroth of the Exodus ("Palestine Exploration Fund Special Papers," Appendix I.).

Riding across from these ruins to Romani direct, one did not touch Mahamdiya Camp, but one struck another corner of the

world that recalled ancient times. East of Mahamdiya there is a great lagoon extending for nearly fifty miles towards El Arish, and bearing the name of the *Sabkhet*, or Lake, of Bardawil. Its western extremity is formed by an amazingly steep cliff of sand, about 100 feet high, and of a pitch such as one would hardly believe possible with so fluid a soil. Over its crest ran the northern part of the long line of barbed wire that protected our infantry from the Turkish attack in August, 1916. And from the little redoubt above the crest one looked towards the east over a vast level floor of dry salt marsh, extending so far that my somewhat defective eyes could not see its end, and in the distance salt marsh and lagoon and sea all seemed to be blended together in a shimmering haze. The salt sparkles on the dry bed, and scrub grows on the banks. This is the *Serbonian Bog* of the classical writers. Part of it is still a lagoon, but at the western end, where I saw it, the bed is fissured and hard.

The pleasantest event that ever took me on horseback to Mahamdiya was a concert, given there by the "Lena Ashwell Party," that has brightened up so many evenings for the E.E.F. Their incursion thus far into the wilds was something of a venture, for no womenfolk ever crossed the Canal. But by coming to Mahamdiya they found an audience as appreciative as any of their many military listeners could ever have been. The hangar in which they were to sing was a large one, but not large enough to accommodate the many thousands who wished to hear them. So tickets were doled out to each unit proportionately, and lots were drawn for them. Special trains were run from Romani up the little branch line that winds through the sand-dunes, but many of the men had to march.

I left my nag in the horse-lines at divisional headquarters, and joined my chief there. We walked down to the aerodrome in good time, to find the vast dark shed already nearly full. A few seats in the middle were reserved for officers, but the audience was allowed to distribute itself pretty much as it liked, and thereby an opportunity occurred to enliven the period of waiting. Somebody struck up a song, and the others—a thousand or two—joined in. The first few songs were perfectly inane and sufficiently tuneful. Then it gradually dawned on the gathered crowd that it was free to sing what it liked. The iron hand of

the sergeant-major was removed, the Colonel's grey head was one of hundreds in the centre of the throng. So a topical vein was introduced, and we listened to the epic of Brasso, sung to the stirring strains of "Australia will be there." After months of rigid discipline and eye-wash, the division was loose at last.

Just as the huge choir was beginning to realise the possibilities of the occasion, the Great Ones appeared in the haze of tobacco smoke. A Staff Captain, leading one of the fair vocalists to the platform, blushed to the chorus of "Who's yer lady friend?" General Brasso himself, for the first time in all his career, could not make his voice heard above the din. Cheers and catcalls, whistles and shouts, provoked the authorities to fury and the concert-party to uncontrolled giggles. The A.P.M. was paralysed. Finally, another General, who scored by being a stranger, mounted the platform and announced that the show would begin.

In the almost uncanny silence that followed, we were privileged to hear the first number of a programme that appealed to every member of the audience. There were songs grave and gay, violin solos classical and modern, vocal duets, recitations, and some really admirable impersonations by the comic man. The accompanist played his piano—played *with* his piano at times—in a way that was new to me. He seemed to enjoy himself, when playing accompaniments that must have been long familiar to him, as though the instrument were some live creature dancing and laughing with him. All of those with whom I talked afterwards agreed that his performance was something unique, something on a different plane altogether from accompanying as we had known it hitherto.

Many of the songs were chosen to suit popular tastes, and their ragtime choruses went with a swing as the vast audience joined in. But there were other songs of a different sort, dainty ballads beautifully rendered by a soprano voice so light that it seemed to flutter on the air, and there was music from the violin that carried us away from the desert altogether, and made us forget the routine and the red-tape.

When it was over we filed out into the moonlight, and, as my chief and I slowly strolled up to headquarters, two of the fair vocalists passed us on trotting camels, evidently relishing a

novel experience. The solitary ride over the white dunes was a fitting close to the most enjoyable evening of my first year abroad. The notes of some of those songs still hung in my head, and, down on the track in the valley below me, the files of infantry were singing as they tramped back to Romani. Music in the desert is appreciated to an extent that perhaps even the musicians who entertained us at Mahamdiya hardly realised.

A few days afterwards my own little unit moved to Mahamdiya, and passed a fortnight there with much enjoyment. At Romani a large and hairy goat had been "taken on the strength of the unit." As a portable dairy-farm it was hardly a success, but it kept my horse company at Mahamdiya in a tin stable that we erected, made out of the fragments of a Hindu kitchen, and for some time it accompanied us on our travels. Once I travelled to Port Said for "a day's leave," though the actual time one spent in Port Said was only a few hours. But it was my last look at shops and civilians for six months, and, apart from this, the journey on the light railway from Mahamdiya along the beach was interesting, even if devoid of any notable features. The sunshine on the waves, the seagulls, the views over the lagoon towards the distant Canal, with its line of trees—all were a relief after the desert.

While stationed at Romani, the large camp at Bir-el-Abd was added to my area, as a portion of my division was stationed there. But to my mind Abd was a most depressing place. The camp itself was scattered and shapeless, the country immediately adjoining was monotonous and barren. The palm-trees, round the wells that gave the camp its name, were scanty, and near them lay the grisly relics of the rearguard battle fought as the Turks retreated from Romani. Abd lay half-way between the Canal and El Arish, and was for many months a military centre of some importance. But by the summer of 1917 all its glory had departed, and only a few huts by the station remained. North of Abd, on the strip of sand that separates Lake Bardawil from the Mediterranean, and at the point now known as Katib-el-Galss, rises a curious little hill, almost like an island, known to the ancients as Mount Casius. It is mentioned by Herodotus and other classical writers. Near it are wells, a few palms, and a little cultivation. Its present height is about 200 feet. Near

its summit is said to have stood a temple of Zeus Ammon, and on its western flank was the tomb of Cn. Pompeius Magnus.

Our troops at Abd, infantry and gunners, were bivouacking in the open, having left their tents behind at Romani. At that time no bivouac sheets were issued, and all through the torrents of rain that fell in December and January these men—from Colonels downwards—were shivering under the modest shelter provided by Desert Column, a ground sheet and an overcoat. The sand was too soft to allow of dug-outs, and wood was prohibitively scarce. For the first time I had a glimpse of active-service conditions.

On January 22 the remainder of the division left Romani and Mahamdiya, and again I travelled with the residue of my small unit on the headquarters train. But although we escaped the tedium of the march, our journey was in no sense luxurious. At 9 a.m. we were perched on our baggage in a truck. A sandstorm had been blowing for a day and a half, and it was bitterly cold. The line to the junction at Romani was blocked by sand, and native labourers were trying to clear it away. At 1 p.m. we moved off, and reached Romani, three miles distant, half an hour later. Then came another long delay, as the line between Romani and Abd was blocked. The whole Staff of the division was on the train, but in spite of that it refused to start. They were all in open trucks and very cold, but still it sat there. My men first of all dropped the goat overboard for an airing, and then a football, which enabled us to keep warm. Darkness came on, and with it the pangs of hunger. The Y.M.C.A. stood not very far away, and it was invaded by the elect as the hour for their dinner approached. They "came down like a wolf on the fold," and even the greatest of them were nibbling sardines and biscuits at the counter, thankful even for that—and tea!

At 9 p.m. we had covered three miles in twelve hours, but a little later the train moved away with its precious burden, and deposited us all on the siding at Abd Station at midnight. We slept where we lay, and next morning pitched our camp.

But only three days later I was on the move again, with half my unit, accompanying one or two of the Staff who were arranging for our camp at points farther east. We reached Bir-el-Mazar on the 26th, and spent the ensuing three days, as usual, in settling ourselves down and learning our way round the new

district. Mazar was a camp somewhat like Abd in its arrangements. Its redeeming feature was the fine view from it of the rugged Maghara range to the south, the scene of a small engagement with the Turks in the previous October. Unfortunately, pressure of work prevented me from visiting the very interesting group of ruins lying in the area between Mazar and the sea at the east end of Lake Bardawil. These ruins are now known as *El Flusiat*, or *Phelusiat*, *El Khuniat*, and *Taba Flusiat*. In ancient times they formed part of the city of Ostracina. It is mentioned in classical itineraries, but its history is obscure. It consisted of two separate cities, rather more than a mile apart. The northern or maritime group had a harbour on the north side of the lake, not on the sea. The southern group on the mainland contains the more important ruins. Ostracina was certainly a military post in Roman days, and may have had an earlier origin. It lay at an important road junction, where the track from Palestine divided into three routes towards Egypt. One ran through "Cassios, Pentaschœnon, Pelusium, Heracles, and Janis towards Alexandria"; a second followed the present railway and caravan route and was defended by fortified posts; and a third ran from Mazar to Clysma (Suez). The ruins near the Sheikh's tomb at Mazar are of Roman or Byzantine origin. In early Christian times Ostracina was the seat of a Bishop, and one of its Bishops, Abraham by name, was present at the Council of Ephesus. It was rebuilt and enlarged by Anastasius I., then again by Justinian. The latter Emperor fortified the adjoining caravan routes, and is responsible for the ruins still existing in the Maghara Hills. The town was destroyed by the Arabs in A.D. 639. They then rebuilt it under the name of El Ouaradah ("The Place of Arrival"), and Caliph el-Hakim erected a mosque there in 1017. It was sacked by the Crusaders in 1249, and at the same time they pillaged the district as far as Katia. It was finally destroyed by an earthquake in 1302.

During recent years the natives of El Arish have been using it as a quarry, removing its marbles and mosaics for sale in Port Said and Damietta. The ruins are thus chiefly composed of foundations, and are largely buried under drifting sand. Very little brickwork remains, the walls being of masonry. In 1914 excavations were commenced by M. Clédat, who has since

published the results under the title of *Fouilles à Khirbet-el-Flousiyeh* in the Annual Report for 1916 of the Service des Antiquités de l'Egypt. Three large monuments remain, none of them older than the period of Justinian. There is a pentagonal fortress in the "mainland city," with walls 6 feet thick. There are also two fine basilican churches. The southern and larger one measures 207 by 73 feet, and consists of an atrium, northex, and three-aisled nave with columns and an apse. The northern one is very much smaller, but is similar in general arrangement. Plans of both appear in M. Clédat's paper. These two interesting churches were formerly lined with marble, and give some indication of Ostracina's importance in early days.

In some part of the adjoining Serbonian Bog a Persian army under Darius Ochus, on its way to invade Egypt in 350 B.C., was partially destroyed, an event commemorated in Milton's lines in "Paradise Lost" (II. 293).

> ". . . That Serbonian Bog,
> Betwixt Damiata and Mount Casius old,
> Where armies whole have sunk."

After only three days at Mazar, my little party was again hustled on, with the advance-party of the Staff. Late on the night of January 29 we reached El Arish, then our Railhead, and the point where at last we joined Desert Column.

CHAPTER XII

EL ARISH TO PALESTINE

FOR close on a hundred miles, from Kantara to the neighbourhood of El Arish, the old road is almost devoid of interest. In one sense it cannot be called a road at all. There is no very definite track, for the north wind soon blows sand over the footprints of camels and men. But somehow the caravans have always found their way from one lonely well amid a clump of palm-trees to another many miles away, avoiding the worst of the sand-dunes. For years before the war a stranger might have trusted to the telegraph-wires as a guide all the way to Gaza. Since the war, the track has become unmistakable for any future tourist, should some eccentric European prefer to traverse the waste on camel-back rather than in a comfortable restaurant-car, as will soon be possible.

There is nothing in all this hundred miles that is worth the labour entailed in seeing it, and the few objects of interest—the ruins of Fort Cabrias, of Pelusium, and of Ostracina; the eminence of Mount Casius; the view from Katib Gannit—all lie far off the track. Even the little Bedouin huts that dot the hillsides of Southern Palestine are missing, and a couple of rough Sheikhs' tombs are the only evidence of human life, past or present. At the oasis of Katia a great forest of date-palms provides a welcome shade. In pre-war days this oasis must have been dotted with black Bedouin tents, but these disappeared with the approach of the Desert Column, and even the Katia oasis is of little interest to a traveller who has seen larger date-groves in Egypt. All the way from Kantara to El Arish the scenery hardly varies—a long succession of sand-dunes, with intervals of *sabkhet* dotted with palms, and an occasional glimpse of salt marsh or sea towards the north.

But as one reaches the groves and wells of Masaid, where the

track approaches the beach, one notices a difference at last, and from the glaring sandy hills one sees the little town of El Arish, with its one minaret and its flat roofs. Beyond the town is the Wadi-el-Arish, a dry river-bed that becomes a swirling torrent when winter rains fall in the interior of Sinai. This is the "river of Egypt" or the "brook of Egypt" mentioned in the Bible. It is the natural frontier between Egypt and Palestine, and formed the boundary of the ancient kingdom of Judah. Moses was told in a vision that "the border [of the land of Canaan] shall fetch a compass from Azmon unto the river of Egypt" (Num. xxxiv. 5). On another occasion "Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt" (1 Kings viii. 65). The name appears again in one of Isaiah's prophecies (Isa. xxvii. 12).

The ancient name of El Arish was *Rhinocolura* or *Rhinocorura*, and it was evidently a place of some importance as a maritime city. Some of the classical writers regard it as belonging to Egypt, others include it in Palestine. Polybius is among the former, and reckons *Raphia* as the frontier of Cœle-Syria. Ptolemy does likewise. The *Itinerarium Antonini* places it halfway between Raphia and Ostracina. But the most interesting account of it and its origin is given by Diodorus Siculus:

> "Actisanes, King of Æthiopia, having conquered Egypt, with a view to the suppression of crime in his newly acquired dominion, collected together all the suspected thieves in the country, and after judicial conviction cut off their noses and sent them to colonise a city which he had built for them on the extremity of the desert, called from their mishap *Rhinocolura*, situated on the confines of Egypt and Syria near the shore, and from its situation destitute of nearly all the necessaries of life. The soil around it was salt, and nearly all the well-water within the walls was bitter. Necessity, the mother of invention, led the inhabitants to adopt the following novel expedient for their sustenance. They collected a quantity of reeds, and, splitting them very fine, they wove them into nets, which they stretched for many *stadia* along the seashore, and so snared large quantities of quails as they came in vast flights from the sea."

Strabo gives the same story, but Seneca ascribes its origin to a Persian King and includes it in Syria. Strabo describes it as a great commercial centre for Indian and Arabian merchandise, which came up the Red Sea by ship and then was conveyed across country via Petra.

El Arish has been the scene of much fighting, like other places on this part of the Mediterranean littoral, and witnessed a severe struggle between Bonaparte and the Turks in 1799. The story of that great leader's march there from Egypt has been touched on in the last chapter. At 8 a.m. on February 8, 1779, General Reynier took up his position outside the town, and sent a courier post-haste by camel to summon his commander-in-chief from Cairo.

> "The Turks occupied the fort and a position outside the village, the houses of which are built of stone; they had barricaded themselves there, protected by the artillery in the fort. As soon as the enemy had satisfied himself how few cavalry the French possessed, he despatched his own to their flank and rear. The Turks defended all the wells and palm-groves. The French had bivouacked on a small sand-hill, without water, shade, forage, or fuel. Abd-Allah with his remaining troops, and twelve guns to arm the fort, in which there were then only three, was expected any moment from Gaza. The position of the enemy was formidable. Reynier recognised this, but, after taking all circumstances into consideration, ordered the attack. He took all possible precautions. After a brisk cannonade of half an hour, the 85th *demi-brigade* rushed the village at the double; 500 Turks were killed or captured, 3,500 others made for the fort, where they were surrounded; the Turkish cavalry retired, and took up a position a mile and a quarter from El Arish, covered by a great valley, on the road to Gaza." [The Wadi-el-Arish, M.S.B.] "Reynier lost 250 men killed or wounded; the army murmured at this; and reproached him for it. 'These reproaches were undeserved; this General did everything that prudence and circumstances demanded.'*
>
> * "Mémoires de Napoléon."

"Abd-Allah arrived to relieve El Arish, with his 8,000 men from Gaza, on the evening of February 11. He took up a position behind his cavalry, on the right bank of the *wadi* of the *Egyptus*. Reynier's position had become very critical, but Kleber's division, having embarked at Damietta on Lake Menzaleh, had landed at the foot of Tina, near the ruins of Pelusium, five miles from Katia. They continued their march with all haste to El Arish on February 11, and arrived there on the morning of the 12th.

"General Kleber undertook the siege of the fort. General Reynier concentrated his division on the morning of the 12th in the palm-groves on the left bank of the *wadi*, opposite Abd-Allah's division; he passed the days of the 13th and 14th in studying the terrain, in making his arrangements, in instructing the officers who were to command his columns, and during the night of the 14th to 15th he carried out one of the cleverest military operations possible.* He struck camp at 11 p.m., marched up the *wadi* of the Egyptus for two and a half miles; arrived at this point, he crossed the *wadi*, and drew up his army for battle with his left on the *wadi* and his right on the Syrian bank. . . . In perfect silence his division was formed into columns, by regiments. . . . Thus disposed, the advance was begun; as soon as the first sentinel was encountered, a halt was ordered and the position rectified. The three detachments of grenadiers hastened into the hostile camp from three different directions. Each detachment was equipped with several dark lanterns, and each soldier wore a white handkerchief on his arm; moreover, the difference in language made recognition more easy.

"At once the alarm was raised in Abd-Allah's camp; Reynier, with the centre column, arrived at the tent of the Pasha, who had only just time to escape on foot; several *kachefs* of Ibrahim Bey's were captured. The enemy left on the battlefield 400 or 500 dead, 900 prisoners, all his camels, a large part of his horses, and all his tents and baggage. Abd-Allah escaped in terror, and only rallied his division at Khan Yunus. Reynier had only three men

* "Mémoires de Napoléon."

killed and fifteen or twenty wounded; he encamped on the 17th on the position formerly occupied by the enemy, covering the siege of El Arish. 'This operation does great credit to this General's coolness and wise disposition of his forces.'"*

Meanwhile, Bonaparte himself was hurrying to El Arish from Cairo, and arrived there on the 17th. On arrival at Abd-Allah's camp he expressed his gratification with the troops' success in their fighting on the previous night. The remainder of Bonaparte's expeditionary force arrived at El Arish on the 18th to 20th February, as already mentioned in Chapter XI.

> "Abd-Allah's defeat had no effect on the garrison of the fort, which seemed determined to offer a most stubborn resistance."

French artillery was then brought into position, and after five or six hours' fire a breach was made in the fort on the 19th.

> "General Berthier then summoned the garrison; there was no officer of high rank at its head; it was commanded by four captains. They chose two of their number to reply to the summons; their orders were to defend the fort till the last, and they were determined to obey; they would listen to nothing else. Finally they decided, as their ultimatum, that they would agree to a truce of fifteen days, at the conclusion of which they would yield up the fort if they had not been relieved. These leaders spoke with resolution, and seemed resolved to run the risk of an assault on them. Our representatives were then so near the fort they could hear the *imams* addressing the soldiers and the prayers that they were reciting. All these men were fanatics. The assault, though its success was probable, would perhaps cost us 400 or 500 men, a sacrifice that we were not in a position to make. However, there was not a moment to lose. Abd-Allah had rallied his force at Khan Yunus, and he was receiving reinforcements every day; it appeared from the demeanour of the garrison that relief was hoped for; the water of the El Arish wells was giving out. It was urgently necessary to end the siege.

* "Mémoires de Napoléon."

"General Dommartin collected all his divisional artillery and bombarded the fort on February 20. The gunners fired 800 or 900 rounds with such success that they spread death and terror among the garrison. Every shell killed someone, for all burst inside a small fort, where men were crowded together. Then the garrison changed its tone; an armistice was called for; after vain appeals, the four captains signed the terms of capitulation that were submitted to them. The garrison laid down its arms on the *glacis*, handed over its horses, swore to proceed by the desert route to Bagdad, and never to bear arms again against the French during the present war, nor to return within a year to Egypt or to Syria. The garrison was escorted fifteen miles in the direction of Bagdad. It had lost in street-fighting and in the attack on the fort 700 men killed, wounded, and prisoners. . . . There were in the fort 250 horses, about 100 camels, and three guns. . . . Engineers repaired the breach, and put the fort into a serviceable condition. . . . General Reynier remained at El Arish, with orders to wait until the prisoners had all been evacuated and the work of renovating the so-called 'Egyptian' fort completed. His division thus became the rear-guard."

Lacroix, from whose book the above passages have been translated, then describes the advance from El Arish through Sheikh Zuweid and Khan Yunus to Gaza, but that stage of Napoleon's journey is best considered later in these pages. During 1916 El Arish was bombarded from the sea and from the air long before it was captured by our troops. On May 18 of that year a combined attack was made by two monitors, a sloop, seaplanes, and six R.F.C. aeroplanes. The naval bombardment was directed at the Turkish camp, the aerodrome, and the fort of the south-west of the town. The fort was reduced to ruins, and the sloop—under cover of the monitor's heavy guns—came close to shore, and shelled the palm-groves at the mouth of the *wadi* where the Turks were taking refuge. A number of photographs were taken by the aeroplanes, and some of these I was lucky enough to see a few days later. Just a month after this combined attack, eleven of our aeroplanes raided the place again, and attacked the large

aerodrome with its ten hangars. From this date onwards there were constant air-raids on El Arish, and on December 21 the town was occupied, without opposition, by our army.

It was nearly six weeks afterwards when I first saw the place. The progress made in that comparatively short period was amazing. The train that conveyed us from Mazar arrived after dark, but we could see that we had reached a busy military centre. The bulky apparatus of my unit was soon unloaded and dumped on the narrow slope of sand between the siding and the beach. My men settled down for a cold night among the bales and boxes, but I was able to spread my valise in a marquee erected as the nucleus of a "Rest Camp for Officers" by the Y.M.C.A. It had only been opened two days, but it was an invaluable boon to the advance-parties arriving in the place after dark, hungry and sleepy. Every time that I came back to El Arish on duty after we had advanced farther east, and even five months later when I returned from Palestine to Egypt, I went to this rest camp for a meal. For in this part of the world there are no hotels or picturesque *estaminets*, and the only alternative to the rest camp is "the unconsumed portion of the day's ration," never very appetising on long journeys.

The following morning was cold and misty. We, who had crossed Sinai slowly, had heard endless stories of "aerial activity" on the part of the enemy, and we had not to wait long for his next visit to El Arish. Sometimes Fritz came by moonlight and machine-gunned the Scotties in the palm-groves by the *wadi* after he had finished all his bombs. Sometimes he swept across the sky in broad daylight, dropping bombs near headquarters in the town, or on the Lancashire lads bivouacking among the sandhills, or, especially, on the busy hive of natives working on the railway sidings at the station. But this dull morning he was invisible, and I could hear the whirr of his engine not very far above me as he passed over the supply-dump, which I was then crossing with a red-tabbed Major from our advance-party. Then came the bombs, small ones I was afterwards informed, but near enough to be disquieting as the first three or four fell. The remainder dropped among bivouacs farther away; then Fritz turned over the sidings, hurled a memento down close to my little flock squatting under the cover

of its baggage, and finally dropped his last into the sea as he made for home.

For the ensuing three or four weeks that we spent at El Arish, we had a visit from him nearly every day, but he only dropped bombs on the first few occasions, the fire from several anti-aircraft guns being evidently more than he cared about.

The time spent at El Arish was thoroughly interesting. From the outgoing divisional Sanitary Section we took over a little camp on the narrow strip of level sand between the railway and the sea. We still had ample tentage, including a marquee for orderly-room. Our predecessors left us a cook-house and a "little wooden hut," that served as a model dwelling for myself. Only a hundred yards away was passable bathing: rather chilly in early February, and tempered by sharp-edged rocks, but bathing nevertheless. West of us was a small clump of palms inhabited by Australian engineers, beyond them a long succession of water-troughs, and then a large palm-grove which sheltered the majesty of divisional headquarters. From this point westwards ran a long line of camps of the Anzac Mounted Division, extending towards the wells and palm-groves of Masaid along the beach. Eastwards from my camp there were no tents until one reached the group of huts and marquees at the railway-station.

This station struck me, when I first saw it, as the most remarkable thing connected with this advance across Sinai, and these first impressions have never left me. It was barely six weeks since the advanced units of our Army had marched along the beach and occupied the town. At that time the railway must have been some ten miles away. On January 29 there were six rows of very long sidings in the station, and a branch line ran southwards for three-quarters of a mile into and around the supply dumps. There were also hospital sidings and several level crossings. There were water-tanks and locomotive sheds. And already the railway was being carried farther east; through a deep cutting into the palm-grooves, across the *wadi*, and, when we left El Arish less than a month later, it had reached a point fifteen miles nearer the Palestine frontier.

Abreast of the railway ran the wonderful wire-road, consisting of four widths of ordinary rabbit-wire-netting, fastened

together, and held down at intervals by pegs. It is difficult for English people at home to realise exactly what the engineers accomplished in this advance. Rails and sleepers were very scarce, for Egypt produces nothing in the way of hardware, and they had to be carried up a single line already congested with the rations, forage, and munitions of a large army with thousands of animals. Railways in other parts of Egypt and elsewhere were torn up to meet the demand in Sinai.

Abreast also of the railway and wire-road advanced the hardly less wonderful pipe-tracks. A separate R.E. organisation was responsible for these. They convey water through the pumping station at Kantara, from the Sweet-water Canal, from the Nile, and in the first instance from the far-away mountains of Abyssinia!

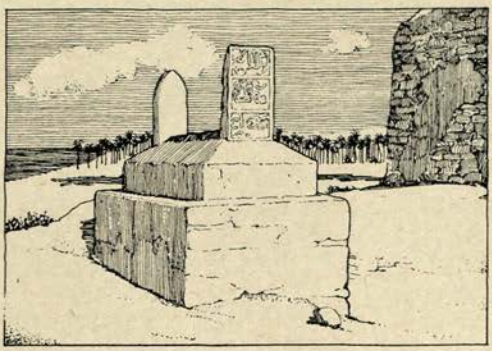
At El Arish there was a very plentiful supply of water from several groups of wells. The largest group—the Abu Ebeid wells—lay in a palm-grove among the sand-dunes, and there some of my men were chlorinating the water. Another group lay nearly a mile from the sea, in the centre of our divisional area, and close to a grove of tamarisks. South of these were the Thamilia wells. Close to the town was another, used by the native inhabitants and guarded by British sentries. Finally, there were a large number of wells and troughs at the mouth of the *wadi*, and below the little sandy bluff crowned by the tomb of Abu Yasir. In the 150 miles from Gaza along the old road to Egypt, the most important wells have always been at Khan Yunus, El Arish, and Katia.

The neighbourhood of El Arish may be roughly divided into three very different portions—the sand-dunes extending for nearly a mile inland from the narrow beach; the town itself, with its surrounding groves of figs and tamarisks; and the great *wadi*, with its forest of palms.

The sand-dunes resemble others of their kind. They are often almost precipitous on one side; they attain a considerable height, are barren of vegetation, and confuse one's sense of topography. Again and again I lost my bearings between the town and the beach, mistaking "Gunner's Ridge" for "Edge Hill"; for when our spick-and-span division arrived, all the hills and valleys were named and the skyline disfigured by direction-



EL ARISH FROM THE SAND DUNES.



TOMB NEAR EL ARISH.
(On left, Mouth of Wadi-el-Arish.)



TOMB OF ABU YASIR AT EL ARISH.

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posts. Some wretched Tommy crawling home to his bivouac would be accosted by an apoplectic General, and shouted at because he could not point out "Anaconda Hill." An intimation appeared in Orders that the G.O.C. was exceedingly sick with the lack of interest in his sky-signs displayed by all ranks, or something to that effect. The engineers were furiously constructing huge three-sided direction-posts when we left El Arish.

Between the sand-dunes were one or two narrow ravines. Along one of these the wire-road ran from the west to the camps round the town, and through another there winds the old caravan route from Katia. From the summits of the highest dunes one has very extensive views—the sea and beach on the north, the *wadi* on the east, the sandy desert and the palms of Masaid on the west, the town on the south, and, far beyond it, the blue hills that modern iconoclasts seek to identify with Sinai and Horeb.

From the sand-dunes one descends to a level plain on the north of the town, dotted with small groves of tamarisks, figs, and lebbak-trees. Under the larger of these groves our smaller units modestly sought to conceal their presence from Fritz, and at the same time took advantage of very welcome shade and green. In the grey and stunted fig-trees batteries were lurking. The well on this side of El Arish was always worth visiting, for there the dusky Rachels came to replenish their water-jars. The town itself is slightly raised above the surrounding country on nearly all sides, and has a curiously flat appearance as seen from any point of view. Except for the mosque and a domed Sheikh's tomb adjoining, there is nothing to break the horizontal lines. Innumerable photographs were taken of the town, and very few of them made really successful pictures, there being no outstanding feature. The streets were narrow and uninteresting. The bazaars, such as they were, were closed. A few of the inhabitants lurked in the small dark houses, and peeped at a passer-by from behind their doors. The town was out of bounds to all ranks, but it was easy for an officer to pass the sentries by innocently asking the way to Desert Column Headquarters. That august institution occupied the principal houses of the town, as well as some smaller dwellings with spacious courtyards.

The central square or market-place was the redeeming feature of El Arish. Here were the offices of the Military Governor of

Sinai and the principal branches of Desert Column Headquarters, occupying fairly modern buildings of some architectural pretensions compared with the mud hovels in the remaining streets. There were trees in the square, and fine views of the hills to the south and south-east. But the most picturesque element was supplied by the gay costumes of the natives, who formed a distinct contrast with the Egyptian *fellahin* and town-dwellers that we had left behind us, as well as with the poverty-stricken Bedouins of Sinai. In nearly every case these citizens of El Arish wore a red *tarbush* with a white turban wrapped round it. One day I watched a few worshippers entering the mosque after the *muezzin* had wailed from the minaret, and was surprised to see a number of prosperous-looking men in black robes emerge from the surrounding lanes. The mosque itself is of no antiquarian or architectural interest. The natives, on the other hand, were, as a rule, good-looking people with strong features, and some of them might have sat as models for Michelangelo's statue of "Moses" or for his frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.

The fort, when I saw it, was in a battered and ruinous condition. How far this was due to the bombardment in the previous spring I cannot say. Some of its less damaged portions were occupied by a detachment of R.E.'s. In the centre was a well, and round about were lying a few marble columns. The latter bore no distinguishing features to indicate their date. I saw others — perhaps removed from the adjoining fort — used to decorate one of our battalion's lines, one or two more in the supply depôt nearer the station, and one at least near the *wadi* mouth. Possibly they were relics of the ancient city of *Rhinocolura*.

The Wadi-el-Arish is the most remarkable geographical phenomenon of this part of the world. It rises in the central portion of the Sinai peninsula, and is dry for the greater part of the year. But as in the Wadi-el-Ghuzze farther north, there is a constant supply of water beneath its sandy bed, and this helps to irrigate the cultivated patches along its course. Our mounted troops rode along the *wadi* to *Maghdaba*, twenty-five miles south of El Arish, in the small hours of the morning of December 23, 1916, and a very successful engagement took place there. As already stated in the previous chapter, Sir William Willcocks identifies Maghdaba with the Rephidim of the Bible, the place

where the Israelites met with opposition from the Amalekites, and where they eventually defeated them and gained possession of the wells in the little oasis. Maghdaba at the end of 1916 was a small Turkish fortified outpost with permanent buildings. From Rephidim, Sir William Willcocks conjectures, the Israelites went three days' journey northwards to the beach at El Arish (*Alush*) to trap quails in the autumn (Exod. xvi. 13; Num. xxxiii. 13).

Just as it was pleasant to find even a small Eastern town at El Arish after a hundred miles of uninhabited desert, so it rested our sand-tired eyes to find patches of brilliant green cultivation and shady palm-groves in the flat bed of the *wadi*. *Shadoofs* and *sakkiyehs* groaned out their weird dirge as they raised water from the shallow wells. Picturesque natives in brightly coloured robes of cotton worked among their little fields, and dignified beasts, such as we had last seen in Fayyum or the Delta, took their share in this primitive agriculture. The great palm-groves were dotted with the white tents of the "Jocks," with their kilts and tam-o'-shanters. At the mouth of the *wadi*, and on a bluff just west of it, stood a little Sheikh's tomb, bearing the name of Abu Yasir or Nebi Yaser. It was a small building of no importance, but it formed a prominent object in all views of the beach. Near it were two tombstones of more recent date, one a finely designed though simple white marble memorial to a General who had fallen in the operations at Romani in the previous August. I was informed that it had been sent from Constantinople. As we came up the line we had noticed memorials of German soldiers, one at Bir-el-Abd that caught my eye being inscribed "*Damian Scherer, Baden.*" The other tombstone on this bluff near El Arish attracted my pencil one Sunday afternoon, and while I was working Fritz came over. He dropped nothing on my head, but two men who were working a heliograph close by informed me that a few days earlier one of his bombs had knocked a corner off the Sheikh's tomb.

Just below the Sheikh's tomb was a small wooden pier where our ships had landed supplies, with some difficulty, during the first weeks after our occupation, before the railway arrived. Close to the tomb and near the pier was the east end of the railway sidings. In early days one climbed on to a truck if one

wished to travel, asking no permission. Tickets were, of course, unknown, and even movement orders had not come into general use.

When it became known that we were to advance into Palestine, the gutter press at home began to scent headlines. At least one enterprising provincial rag hoisted the banner of the "New Crusaders." Even in the latter half of 1917 a certain weekly displayed on its cover a beefy Anzac, opposite "a verye perfekte knyghte" and his large red-cross shield. But these editors and journalists had overlooked the trifling fact that our Army was advancing from a Moslem country already under our protection, and that we had recently taken the Hedjaz itself under our wing. It became necessary to warn writers and preachers that a little forethought was expected in such matters.

From El Arish to the frontier of Palestine at Rafa is approximately thirty miles as the crow flies, and not very much farther by the route on which we "New Crusaders" marched. On the day or two preceding our departure my own small unit had begun to reduce its remaining baggage to a minimum. My camp-bed and surplus kit were sent down to Romani to be added to my men's kits already deposited there. We got rid of all our tents except one, which was held in reserve in the hope that we should be allowed to carry it forward. But, even then the amount of gear that still remained to be loaded on camels was rather appalling. A Sanitary Section is assumed to be in possession of a 30-cwt. motor-lorry, into which its very awkward and cumbersome property can easily be packed on the rare occasions when it moves.

But we were ordered "to become mobile" at short notice, and as a result we certainly scored in one way. We saw something of the country ahead of us in its spring freshness, before the Army trampled down the cornfields and clothed everything in a cloud of dust. My men marched as light as the infantry.

Our trouble was not with personal gear at all. It was with such unwieldy articles as shovels, rakes, flag-poles, buckets, pick-axes, and brooms—all in considerable numbers; with drums of oily disinfectants that drove the camels *magnoon* (mad) if they leaked; and with heavy apparatus such as a water-clarifier or a "portable" disinfector. Every time that we moved—and from

that time moves were of frequent occurrence—all the picks and shovels and rakes, and especially the twenty heavy flag-poles with their cords, had to be tied up in bundles and then roped on to the camels' backs. Often some impedimenta dropped off, and the procession had to halt while they were replaced. If we moved in the dark something invariably got lost. The drums of disinfectant could usually be carried fairly easily if the camels allotted to us were provided with "nets," but it was quite impossible to secure them with one long rope to the pack-saddle. Once I risked leaving all the disinfectants behind, returning them to the A.S.C. and relying on being able to draw them afresh at our next halt. But there were flies in the G.O.C.'s mess when we arrived at the next halt, and everybody concerned—from the people who ran the General's errands to the flurried A.S.C. officers at their brand-new dump—were uniformly unsympathetic. So the cresol, and the green oil, and the bottles of formaldehyde, and the Lefroy's fluid, and the "C" solution had all to be carried on camel-back somehow, so long as camels formed our only means of transport.

But when we had packed everything on to the groaning and grumbling beasts, early on the morning of February 22, the question of the box disinfectors became serious. Assuredly they had never been designed for camel transport. One was a wooden box about four feet square, and with metal fittings; the other was like a collapsible wardrobe, about a yard square and also with metal fittings. Even when we had removed the boilers, these appliances seemed to overload the camel that carried them. A camel can carry 300 to 350 pounds, but the load must be evenly balanced on each side of its pack-saddle. The poor beast rose with some difficulty, and struggled along the beach with its fellows to our rendezvous. It stumbled wearily over the level crossings, and as it approached the ambulance with which we were to travel, the officers one and all said that if I tried to make that camel march twelve miles with us that day it would assuredly die! I told them that the authorities refused to allow me to leave the wretched boxes behind; but, as it seemed to me a choice of evils, my naturally soft heart prevailed. I pitched the disinfectors on to the sand, told my staff-sergeant, who was remaining at El Arish a few days longer, to return the things to

Ordnance, and awaited developments. A number of unpleasant letters were written later, asking "on what authority you returned part of your sectional equipment at El Arish?" but eventually the little breeze subsided.

At the tail of the ambulance's long string, we marched over the sand-dunes to join one of our brigades. As we halted on the slopes overlooking the town we saw columns of infantry approaching from several directions, converging on a track across the *wadi*-bed. Fritz had already paid his breakfast-time visit and gone back to rest; he may or may not have seen the beginnings of these "movements of troops."

On the beach the mounted Anzacs were advancing abreast of us, a picturesque crowd. These Colonials always look their best on horseback. They seem to grow out of their rough ponies like modern centaurs, but they resemble nothing on earth in the way that they sometimes wear their equipment. If you see a British cavalryman passing, you always know the exact point where each article of equipment is to be found on his saddle. A mounted Australian, on the other hand, often suggests a cross between a Christmas-tree and a bush-ranger. His "billy-can" is probably tied to his horse's tail. He may or may not be wearing a tunic or a hat—it depends how he feels. But in spite of all these idiosyncrasies, he looks what he is—every inch a fighting man. "Allah finish Australia!" shouted the Turks at Romani when they met these doughty cavaliers in battle. And since Romani that battle-cry must have sounded many a time, for Johnny Turk knows full well what he has to expect as the slouch-hatted Colonials approach.

My own division was marching in several parallel columns inside the wall of sand-dunes that separates the beach from the hinterland. The infantry had the benefit of the wire-road still over the worst portions of the way. Mounted officers rode close to their men at the edge of the wire-road. The artillery and other horse traffic moved along another parallel line, and the enormous column of camels on a third. Each unit provided a certain number of men to walk with the camels as escort, besides the blue-pinafored Egyptian drivers of the C.T.C. (Camel Transport Corps), who also went on foot. It might be thought that a Tommy would prefer strolling along beside a camel to taking

his place in a hot and dusty "column of fours." As a matter of fact he does not. For one thing, a camel walks very slowly, much slower than infantry on the march; moreover, it hardly ever halts, on account of the strain involved in kneeling down and rising to its feet again when fully loaded; and, finally, it paddles through heavy sand, while the battalions, in this case, were marching on the wire-road.

All loads were strictly limited by a little book of instructions. Very few tents were carried. Two bell-tents were allowed for each battalion, and one for each smaller unit, as orderly-rooms. All other unit stores were reduced to a minimum, including "dixies," shovels, picks, iron rations, ammunition, etc. Each man carried one blanket and a ground sheet. His second blanket followed in "train echelon." Officers were allowed 30 pounds of luggage only; thus, ten officers' kits were carried on one camel. Then a large number of *fantasses* were also carried on camels. These are metal tanks, about the size of a large suit-case, each holding 10 to 15 gallons. A camel can carry two 15-gallon fantasses filled with water. These are filled by a hose at the nearest well or water-supply, through a large circular aperture closed by a tightly washered screw-cap. Normally every man is allowed 1 gallon of water per day for all purposes, but during actual fighting the allowance is reduced to ½ gallon or less. In practice I found that half of my daily gallon was required in the cook-house—for tea, cooking, and somewhat sketchy washing-up—leaving me half a gallon for casual drinks and for ablutions. Besides the camels accompanying each unit, there were others carrying ammunition and supplies for larger formations.

The men marched in "shorts," but wore serge tunics and a modified pattern of webbing equipment. About this time my division was supplied with an admirable form of bivouac, copied —if rumour is to be believed—very accurately from those carried by the Turks, and manufactured by Waring and Gillow. Whether this pattern was a copy or not I cannot say, but undoubtedly the Turkish Expeditionary Force that came to grief at Romani in August, 1916, was admirably equipped; and I believe that our authorities borrowed other ideas from the enemy in regard to pack-saddles, "cacolets" (or ambulance saddles for camels), and smaller details. Certainly the new bivouac was

a great boon. It consisted of a square of waterproof cloth—not unlike a Burberry fabric—about 5 feet 6 inches square. Round all four sides were buttons and button-holes, so that two squares could be fastened together to form a shelter for two men, 11 feet by 5 feet 6 inches. Each man carried a light pole, about ¾ inch diameter and rather less than a yard long, as a walking-stick. Two of these poles fitted into rings in the middle of the 11 foot length, and thus formed the bivouac into a simple span-roof. Each man also carried several miniature tent-pegs to tether the bivouacs and the poles. Every sheet had light cords and loops in the required positions. If one was likely to remain more than a night or two in any place, it was usual to dig a shallow dug-out under the bivouac, and thus one could form a fairly snug little dwelling. Being an isolated officer, I succeeded in drawing both halves of a bivouac for myself, and for several months lived under their shelter.

Another innovation was the pair of wire-netting sandals that each man carried for use on stretches of sand where no wire-road existed. These were not very popular, but some of my men wore them regularly on their inspection-rounds, when on the sand-dunes.

A few "sand-carts" accompanied each brigade, picking up men who dropped out with sore feet. These casualties were most frequent among cooks, orderly-room clerks, and others who had done little marching. But several lame ducks were able to ride on officers' horses, whose rightful owners were quite glad to foot it along the wire-road with their men.

Most of the vehicles accompanying us were fitted with "sand-wheels," rims of iron about 6 inches wide bolted to the ordinary wheels. But the artillery had another contrivance—called, I believe, a "ped-rail"—consisting of a series of flat thin blocks of wood secured to the wheels by chains. It was a wonderful sight to see the great 60-pounders being dragged over the steep sand-dunes by enormous teams of horses.

At the end of each hour or so we halted for ten minutes, and at midday for an hour. The country through which we moved was in no way inspiring. As we climbed the sandy east bank of the *wadi*, we passed a native mud village with groves of fig-trees. Then came rolling sandy ground covered with scrub.

There were no long views and no features of interest. But as I traversed the same area a month later by train, I noticed a great bank of red poppies blooming among the dull green scrub. The railway was still beside us, and when we bivouacked that night at a place called El Burj we found large supply dumps already in existence. Across the railway sidings was a brigade of Scotties; but after this my division moved to the head of the advancing infantry, the mounted Anzacs still forming a screen in front of us.

El Burj was simply a *sabkhet* among the sandhills, with a few palm-trees and some wells in the dunes between it and the beach. We moved on early next morning, and marched for nearly seven hours without any halt of more than ten minutes. But there was a noticeable difference in the character of the landscape. The scrub became more plentiful, and little desert plants and flowers were mingled with it. We passed the head of the railway on our right. At midday we saw the most welcome sight that had cheered us for many months, a great spreading green tree, and beneath its ample shade a carpet of grass dotted with yellow flowers, for all the world like English daffodils in spring. A little later a marshy lagoon came into view, with palm-trees round it and the great sand-dunes still in the background. Among the palms were the tents of the Anzacs and several wells. These were the wells of "Zawi" mentioned in the story of Bonaparte's Syrian campaign, of "Sheikh Zuweid" to us in 1917.

Sheikh Zuweid was undoubtedly one of the pleasantest spots that we passed on our long journey. For there we first really crossed the boundary between "the desert and the sown." In itself it was not a remarkable place. There were a few mud houses surrounded by an enclosure of cactus hedges. The remaining inhabitants, less than a score, were being collected with their few belongings by our military police when I arrived. They were being sent down the line on camels out of harm's way. But round these houses were gardens full of fruit-trees spangled with white-and-pink blossom. And east of the village stretched a green plain covered with brilliant flowers. Now at last we had crossed the wilderness and reached the open country. North of the village were the wells allotted to my division. Naturally they formed the scene of much of my work in the area.

My bivouac was in a little green valley near the village, on green grass dotted with daisies. But a few days later, as I peeped out of my burrow just after dawn, I saw the khaki turbans of the Indian sappers and miners who were constructing the railway appearing over the edge of the valley a few hundred yards away. Nothing had then been done in the way of excavation or construction, only a few unobtrusive pegs having been driven into the turf. But a small army of Indians and Egyptians had swarmed over the ground by breakfast-time, and the smoke of a locomotive was visible over the shoulder of the hill. As a result of furious shovelling of earth, of frantic laying of sleepers and bolting of rails, that locomotive, with its train of material and water-tanks attached, passed my tent that very afternoon. Two days later sidings were completed, a great stretch of dumps lay before me, chaos and clouds of dust disturbed the pleasant little valley, and the white hospital train ran into a now busy station! The pipe-track followed the railway almost abreast of it.

The method of construction was as follows: The construction train ran on to the last pair of rails laid, and the succeeding rails were stacked on a truck in front of the locomotive, so that natives unloaded them only a few yards from the point where they were to be fixed. All stages of the work were being carried out at once, as in the erection of an American sky-scraper. And the result was a testimonial to the efficiency of British engineers. A siding was laid to the supply depôt, and only a few days later we were able to obtain one of the disinfecting trains described in Chapter V., and thus to "de-louse" a large part of the division.

We remained at Sheikh Zuweid just a fortnight, and on March 9 advanced along the green valley to another bivouac area, known variously as "Kilo 194"—the railway having just reached that point—"Long View," or "El Rasum." The country here was much like the neighbourhood of Sheikh Zuweid, alternating hills and valleys covered with scrub or grass, and high sand-dunes separating us from the sea. The grass was scattered with flowers, iris and orchis of some kind being the most beautiful. I believe that we should have advanced to Rafa earlier than we eventually did, but for difficulties with the water-supply there.

On the 13th my chief and I rode forward to Rafa, and so

crossed the frontier of Palestine. This was not, however, our object in going. Our divisional engineers, and a number of engineers from other divisions were already there, improving old wells and digging or boring new ones. Two of our infantry battalions were covering these operations. At that time the railway was approaching Rafa, but the surroundings had not been spoilt. Little family parties of Bedouins tramped up and down to the wells. With them were the smallest donkeys imaginable, carrying great black water-jars. From Khan Yunus, six miles ahead, came men and boys with eggs and enormous oranges to sell. The Anzacs had occupied Khan Yunus, and the Turks were known to be somewhere not very far ahead of them.

From the various maps published before and during the war, Rafa might be thought to be a large and flourishing town. Actually it consists of two frontier police or customs houses, a few mud huts on a hill near them, and a few more in a valley below. The resident population can never have amounted to a hundred souls before the war. There is one well, near a little garden, that appears to have been once covered with some sort of a small building with marble columns, probably of Roman date. Other columns exist at various points on the frontier-line, but these may have been erected quite recently, as the present frontier was only defined in 1906. At Sheikh Zuweid it was rumoured that a fragment of mosaic pavement had been found, and coins were often dug up. Moreover, the whole line of the "oldest road in the world" is marked by heaps of broken pottery that would no doubt yield archæological finds. But of the "city" or "town" of *Raphia*, mentioned by Polybius, we saw no trace.

The battle of Raphia terminated the Fourth Syrian War, and was fought during the reign of Ptolemy IV. (Philopater), 222-205 B.C. Ptolemy had as his opponent Antiochus of Syria, and, as the latter's headquarters were at Raphia, one may assume that the battle was fought on the south or west of the town. The fight was begun by a charge of elephants, but Ptolemy's Libyan elephants could not stand the smell of Antiochus' Indian elephants, and so would not charge. The soldiers in the howdahs on the elephants' backs carried pikes. The battle raged all day; the Syrians were victorious at first, but were finally defeated.

Antiochus was driven back from Raphia to Gaza. The Syrians lost 10,000 infantry and 300 cavalry killed and wounded and 4,000 prisoners; 3 elephants killed and 3 died of wounds. The Egyptians lost 1,500 infantry and 700 cavalry, 16 elephants killed, and most of the others captured. The story of the battle is told in great detail by Polybius.

More familiar to us was the fight at Rafa, some two months before we arrived on the scene, when our mounted troops charged across the green plains to attack the strong Turkish position on the entrenched hill of Magruntein. Even in March there were still gruesome relics of the battle to be seen, and one could still pick up dozens of cardboard cartridge-boxes bearing the name of the "Munizionen und Wappen Fabrik" at Karlsruhe. Besides tidying up these trenches, we had to deal with the carcasses of numerous camels in various stages of decay that lined the road and the battlefield.

On March 21 we advanced to Rafa, and bivouacked just within the borders of Palestine. The site was ideal for a camp. My unit, as usual, had the three divisional ambulances for neighbours. We were in the midst of rich cornfields, on high ground. North of us, across a green valley, rose the great yellow wall of the dunes, and beyond it lay the long level line of the sea. On the east one looked over green pastures to the distant blue hills between Beersheba and Hebron, the hills where Abraham lies buried. Just below was a little farm, and within its low hedges the headquarters of an infantry brigade and an artillery brigade had just settled down. Divisional headquarters had pitched on a hill between us and Khan Yunus. The ticking of the Douglas motor that worked their electric-light plant sounded distinctly in the darkness. Below us, on the other side, the railway had just emerged on its journey eastwards.

On the evening of Saturday, March 24, about 5 p.m., the division marched away towards Gaza and the enemy, leaving my small unit behind for a few days in the middle of the corn. Besides us, about 400 men, mostly more or less "crocks," were left in charge of the divisional baggage dump, for the minimum of gear was to be taken into action. Late that night a brigade of Anzacs rode past our little camp in the dark, very silently, to take up their position on the right of the infantry. Meanwhile

two more divisions marched through, and a third—only recently formed out of dismounted yeomanry—arrived to take over the Rafa defences. From our camp to Gaza was some nineteen miles, and we only knew that the Turks were somewhere out beyond Khan Yunus.

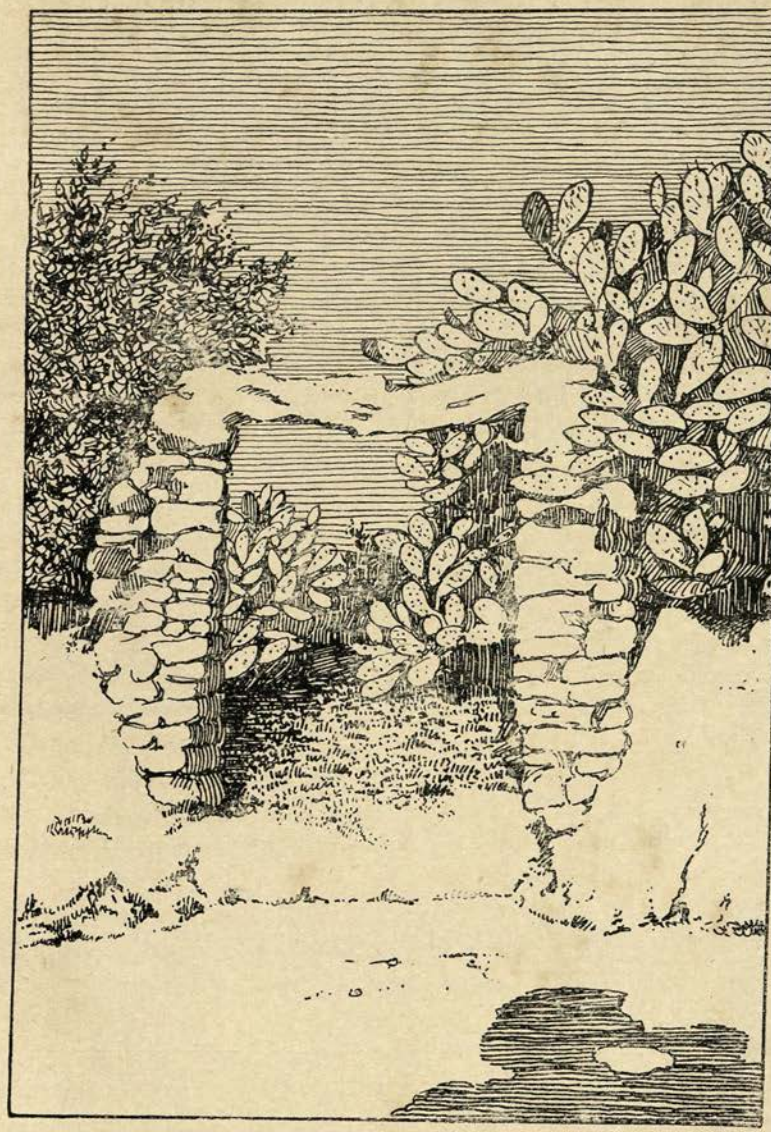
Since that time the line from Rafa to Khan Yunus has been diverted to avoid a heavy gradient, and the station has also been planned in a new position. But in those few days at the end of March it presented an extraordinary appearance. The "train echelon baggage" of several divisions had arrived and had been dumped by the sidings, where a population of troglodytes rapidly arose. A whole succession of little parties, among them several Sanitary Sections, were "living in their boxes" in a literal sense. Mingled with this heterogeneous crowd were bits of canteens, repair shops, every sort of odd unit connected with the army. Troops of horses picked their way through the chaos to water at large tanks fed from the pipe-line. South of the line was a tremendous display of canvas, sheltering the headquarters of "East Force," as it was called in those days, and beyond these rows of spacious marquees lay the aerodrome. North of the line were several hospitals, where we lent a hand in our spare time as the rush of casualties began. But a few days later fresh orders came, and on April 3, just as we were beginning to make the congested area at Rafa rather more tidy, we moved forward to that little strip of Palestine that became so familiar to nearly every man of the E.E.F. between April and November of last year.

CHAPTER XIII

KHAN YUNUS TO GAZA

THE greater part of the army spent the summer of 1917 in a small triangular area just over the frontier of Palestine. From Rafa to the trenches in front of Gaza, at Sheikh Ajlin and Samson's Ridge is some eighteen miles; from Shiekh Ajlin to Tell-el-Fara, and from Tell-el-Fara back to Rafa, the distances are about the same. In this equilateral triangle every village and every feature became familiar. It was supposed by our home folks that we were encamped on ground that was storied and hallowed, that every squalid hamlet was full of Biblical associations, and that such trifling inconveniences as shells and flies would be easily outweighed by the attractions of an Old Testament atmosphere. But the little patch of Palestine that we lived in so long was not conspicuous for its historical interest, for its ancient buildings, or for any special beauty of landscape, though after many months of desert life it seemed an earthly paradise to us in the spring. Historically the chief claim of the district to celebrity lies in the old road, the caravan track that I have ventured to call "the oldest road in the world," that runs through it. In the guide-books this neighbourhood is hardly mentioned, Baedeker devoting only six lines of print to it.

When my little unit moved forward from Rafa on April 2, the first battle of Gaza was over, and our troops were entrenched just across the Wadi Ghuzze. The heat during the fighting had been intense, the thermometer in my tent ranging from 102° to 110° during the middle hours of the day. At Rafa we had seen the backwash of the battle—casualties and prisoners. The railway then ran as far as Khan Yunus, but was rapidly being pushed forward. My horse had been commandeered by the division for a Dago interpreter who was going to requisition something or



A TYPICAL GARDEN GATEWAY AT KHAN YUNUS.

To face page 238.

other, so I joined three of my men who were marching the thirteen miles or so to our new camp beyond Deir-el-Belah, and sent the others on as far as was possible by train. We followed the dusty track over undulating country, thinly scattered with grass, for a few miles, and then came in sight of Khan Yunus, like a vast garden in the midst of sand-dunes and pastures. Extracts from my diary give impressions of Khan Yunus when I first saw it:

March 23, 1917.—". . . I set out this morning with the intention of doing a little futile inspection of other people's camps, but the absurdity of it all struck me very forcibly, so I suddenly changed my mind, and made for the distant clump of trees where I knew the village lay. After crossing the usual sandy pastures, I found myself on the edge of a little depression a mile or so across, all full of gardens, and among them the usual mud houses and what appeared to be something in the nature of architecture. There was a long narrow lane on the south side of the village, along which I rode, between high mud walls sloping back from the gutter. Above them were very high hedges of cactus with yellow flowers. It was thus impossible to see over the top of the little enclosures, but each of them had a sort of triumphal arch of mud and tree-trunks and stones, rather like the lych-gates in jerry-built suburbs, but much more rational and therefore much less ugly. Then I went down a wider street or road, where were some of our troops and numerous urchins selling oranges. Next I arrived quite suddenly in the village bazaar, consisting of some twenty tiny shops in alleys about 6 feet wide. I soon dismounted, for the street was crowded with natives, many of them children, and my horse does not take kindly to crowds after months on the desert. I looked at various Manchester (or Chemnitz?) goods, shaving mirrors, and other usual rubbish, then became nervous about my horse's hoofs among all these children, so moved on and came to the market-place or village square. This was packed with pumping engineers, camels, niggers, Tommies, and—especially—dust. In the centre was a sort of diluted public garden and what appeared to be a bandstand! Evidently the *furor Teutonicus* has reached these parts. On

one side of the square was a fragment of a fine mosque, of about the thirteenth century I should say, and a *muezzin* was calling the faithful to prayer from the tower, though little more than the doorway of the mosque remained. In front of it was a big caterpillar tractor. What a contrast! I escaped from the place with some difficulty, for the dusty main street was packed with a long line of hundreds of camels. Luckily, my horse was used by a camel officer at one stage in its career, so it is camel-proof. . . ."

March 27.—". . . To-day, having finished what little work I had to do by ten o'clock, I walked off to the old village I have already described to you, but this time with a sketch-book. In the four miles odd of this walk I did not meet a soul. On arriving, I went straight to the little square in the middle of the village, and sat down under the welcome shade of that very German bandstand. Fancy bringing such a thing into these remote parts, and surrounding it with a little formal garden and paths of cockle-shells! Perhaps it was a *Biergarten.* In the band-stand a few engineers were quartered. They were working an ancient well close by, over 100 feet deep and 8 or 10 feet in diameter. There was a Gothic vault, forming the roof, that must have dated back to Crusading times. The Germans threw all their pumping machinery down the well when they left, but our people have done wonders in dragging it up and getting the thing going again. There was a little urchin playing in the band-stand. He had just completed a model of an aeroplane out of bits of firewood, and was showing this toy to our Tommies with great glee. I spent a couple of hours in sketching the façade of the mosque, then ascended the minaret or turret, but could see nothing of the battlefield, some twelve miles ahead, owing to a haze—perhaps 'the dust of battle.' Next came some shopping, resulting in a pair of celluloid bracelets for J——. For these I was asked 5 shillings at first, but the salesman eventually contented himself with 1 shilling, and seemed pleased. Then I attempted another sketch, this time an archway or gateway of mud and tree-trunks, opening into a garden enclosed by a high mud wall and cactus hedges."

The mosque at Khan Yunus, referred to above, is not described in any of the few books accessible to me under present conditions, and all that I can find in print is Baedeker's brief mention of "a fine mosque of the time of Sultan Barkuk." This potentate was the founder of the dynasty of the Circassian Mamelukes, and reigned in Cairo during the latter years of the fourteenth century. He was a great builder, and his two mosques there are among the most beautiful in the city.

Khan Yunus, with a slight variation in spelling, figures in Lacroix's account of Napoleon's advance into Palestine, already quoted in these pages. The translation is my own:

> "General Kleber, commanding the advance-guard of the army, started before daybreak on February 22 [1799]; he relied on sleeping at Zâouy [Sheikh Zuweid] in order to reach Khan-Younès on the following day; his orders were to push an advance-post up to Khan-Younès if possible. The Commander-in-Chief set out at 1 p.m. on the 23rd, with 100 camels and 200 guides on horseback. He moved at a rapid trot in order to join the advance-guard; on arriving at the tomb of Karoub, he was surprised that the holes where the Arabs hid their fodder and grain had not been ransacked. Not a soldier was found lagging behind, which might be explained by the fear that the stragglers had of the Bedouins. At the wells of Zâouy and Reffay [Rafa], he was alarmed at seeing no traces of water spilt round them by the troops who should have rested there. Nevertheless, he pushed on, and at last reached a hill overlooking Khan-Younès; but instead of finding his own army there, he found a detachment of Ibrahim Bey's Mamelukes guarding the village, and could descry, in the distance, the camp of Abd-Allah. The Commander-in-Chief realised that, by retiring, he would bring the Mamelukes after him, and so decided to make a bold stroke in another way. At the head of his guides, he made for Khan-Younès. The Mamelukes, taking this detachment to be the van of the French army, betook themselves with all speed to the camp at Gaza, and the French established themselves in the village; but in the evening the Commander-in-Chief came to the conclusion that it would be unwise to

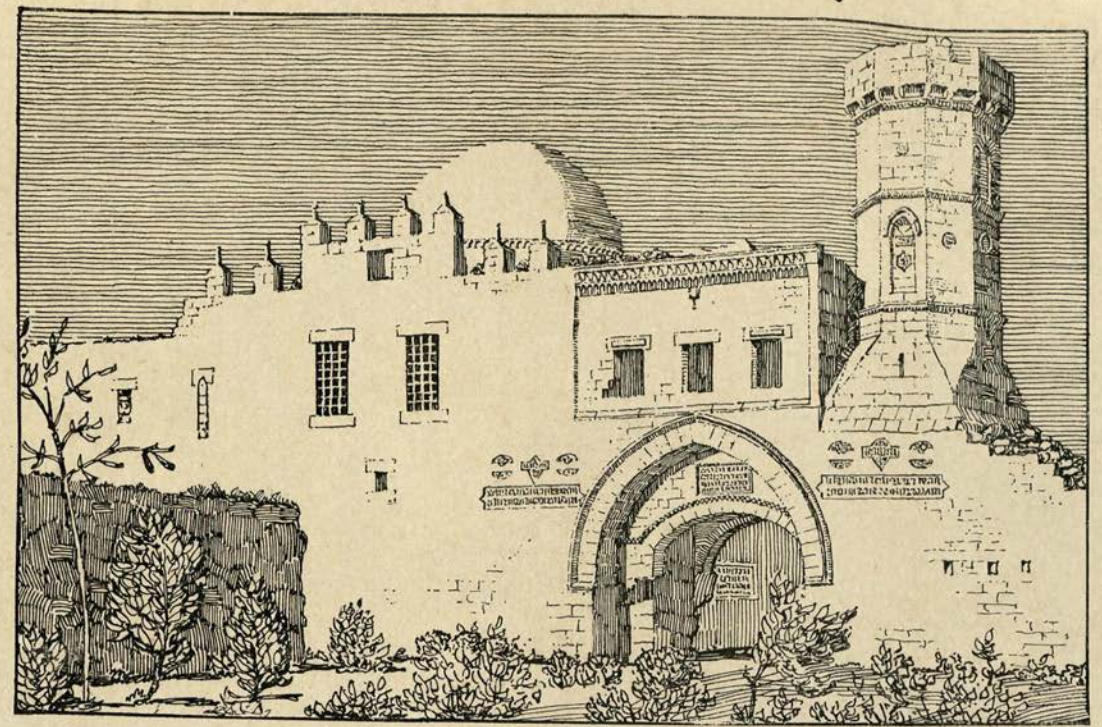
stay there any longer before beginning to look for Kleber. He set out, guided by an Arab who said that he had met the French on the Karak road; and it was indeed there that Kleber had stayed, having marched fifteen hours before finding out his error. As soon as the advanced troops recognised Bonaparte, they hailed him with cries of joy. . . . At midday Kleber's division reached the wells of Zâouy, at the very moment that the rest of the army and the reserve camels arrived there from El Arish. Lannes then took the lead, and bivouacked that night at Khan-Younès. The great desert was past. At Khan-Younès there were large and beautiful gardens; the water of the wells was plentiful and good, enough not only for the needs of that day, but to suffice for further needs, because from this village to Gaza there are no wells.

"'The limits of Africa had now been reached, and we were in Asia. Khan-Younès is the first village in Syria. We were about to traverse the Holy Land. The soldiers began to make all sorts of speculations. All were looking forward to seeing Jerusalem; this famous Zion appealed to all imaginations and aroused every kind of feeling. In the desert, Christians had shown them the wells where the Virgin, coming from Syria, had rested with the Child Jesus. The Generals had with them as dragomans, interpreters, or secretaries, a large number of Syrian Catholics who spoke an Italian jargon, *lingua franca;* they related to the soldiers all their traditional legends, full of superstition.'*

"The army spent February 24 at Khan-Younès, setting off before daybreak the following day (for Gaza). . . ."

After passing Khan Yunus, we marched for a mile or two through fir-groves and plantations of fruit-trees and palms, with sand-dunes on the left. An occasional dead camel varied the monotony of the road. Huge clouds of dust enveloped us. Strings of camels and horses and ambulances crowded the narrow lane between the cactus hedges. Motor transport was now in use, for we were on comparatively hard ground. We passed a casualty clearing station that had just arrived for the first battle

* "Mémoirs de Napoléon."



MOSQUE AT KHAN YUNUS.

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of Gaza, then enormous A.S.C. dumps for several divisions, and a divisional headquarters in a garden. At last we emerged on open fields with a very extensive view ahead of us. The railway was still on our right, but we were close to the railhead with its busy hive of workers. We marched for a few miles over this open ground, and then passed on our left a small village surrounded by cactus hedges and trees, with a Moslem cemetery adjoining it. This was Deir-el-Belah, a name then unknown to us, but afterwards destined to become familiar enough to us all, for it remained during many months the Railhead of our Army.

Nor were we aware then that it had any place in the history of the past. It was very like any other squalid hamlet in the neighbourhood, with its native hovels, its starved-looking people, and its yelping dogs. But since I have been able to obtain access to books, it has become possible to glean a few particulars of its story in ancient days. Of its origin nothing definite is known, and the first evidences of its age are to be found in various fragments of marble columns lying on the ground or built into walls. But there is a little mosque, known as *Gami-el-Khudr*, that tradition says is the site of a large monastery. *Deir-el-Belah* is an Arabic name, and signifies "The Convent in the Date-Palms." *Gami-el-Khudr* means "Mosque of St. George." The small building is entered from a courtyard, and measures approximately 35 feet by 15 feet. It lies very nearly east and west. At the east end are three niches, the central one larger than the others, forming a small apse. There is no doubt that this was originally a Christian church. There is a broken tomb-slab on the floor with Greek crosses on it, and other inscriptions in Greek characters are also to be seen.

It is commonly believed in the Gaza district that St. Hilarion, the first hermit in Palestine, was buried at Deir-el-Belah, where his memory is revered by Christians and Moslems alike. St. Hilarion was born in a village then known as Thabatha, five miles south of Gaza, in A.D. 290, of heathen parents, who sent him to Alexandria to be educated. Here he embraced Christianity, and later became a disciple of St. Anthony. In A.D. 328 he founded a convent in Palestine, apparently on the seashore near Gaza. The following passage is quoted from Archdeacon Dowling's "Gaza":

"The boy-hermit was clad in a sackcloth shirt, which he never changed till it was worn out, a cloak of skins which Anthony had given him, and a blanket such as peasants wear. His earliest diet was a fast until sunset, and then a supper of fifteen figs. His employment was basket-making, after the fashion of the Egyptian monks. His dwelling was so small as rather to resemble a tomb. He had resided in the desert twenty-two years when he first became celebrated for his miracles. The first miracle of healing with which St. Hilarion is credited was the restoration to health of three children at Gaza, whose mother had induced him to come forth from his retreat to see them. Standing beside their bed, the hermit merely uttered the word 'Jesus' and they at once recovered. On his return to his cell, he was so besieged by other applicants for relief that he could no longer lead his secluded life."

Deir-el-Belah appears in mediæval history as "Darum" or "Daroma." In the twelfth century the city of Gaza was included in the barony of Jaffa, one of the chief divisions of Palestine under the Crusaders. But the territory south of the Wadi Ghuzze, for a depth of fifteen miles or so from the sea, formed the fief of Darum, one of the lesser seigneuries of the kingdom of Jerusalem. Darum was also the name of a fortress commanding the road to Egypt. It was built about 1170 by King Amalrich or Amaury, with a deep ditch and seventeen towers. When Saladin marched south in 1187, he dismantled all the fortified cities near the coast except Darum. His army was not large enough to maintain so many garrisons, and if these places fell into Christian hands they would become as formidable to capture as their builders had intended them to be. In the following year King Richard of England made a reconnaissance towards Darum, and at the same time set free a convoy of 12,000 Christian prisoners then on their way to Egypt. Four years later, in the spring of 1192, Richard advanced again on Darum from his base at Ascalon, with an army that is estimated to have numbered some 20,000 men. The French took no part in this enterprise, and the Moslem garrison was a small one. Sir Walter Besant thus describes the capture of the place on May 27, 1192:

"The Franks stormed the town after having effected a breach in the walls, and refused quarter to the inhabitants. The Governor finding all hope of further resistance gone, escaped to Hebron; the superintendent of stores, however, remained, and, determining that the besiegers should reap as little benefit as possible from their conquest, hamstrung all the beasts of burden and burnt them. When the Christians entered the city, they put nearly every one of the inhabitants to the sword, reserving only a few prisoners, for whom they thought they might obtain a heavy ransom."

A reference to the chronicles of Jeoffrey de Vinsauf and of Jacques de Vitry would probably yield fuller particulars of the district during Crusading days, but neither of these two books is accessible to me. The name of Darum appears again in 1352, when, with three other fortresses, it was handed over on Easter Day by the Christians to the Moslems.

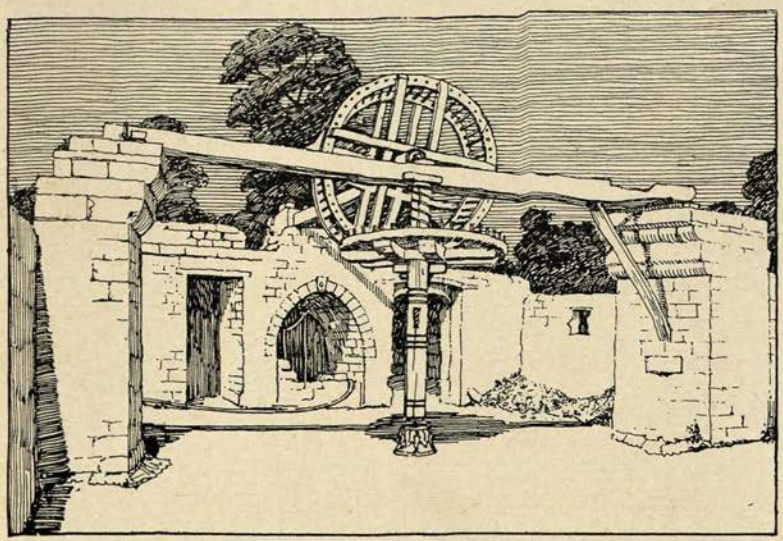
On the day when I first saw Deir-el-Belah it was surrounded by green barley-fields still untrampled by our Army. My little convoy wandered far from the track, for the track was hardly visible, and for a long time we could not see the camp that was our destination. Near Rafa the fields had been divided up into holdings by clumps of aspidistra—that delight of suburban drawing-rooms—placed a yard or two apart, but here no such boundaries were visible. There were large pink mallows among the grass, and the pasture-land on the slopes was dotted with iris, daisies, anemones, coltsfoot, "lords and ladies," pimpernels, and many small flowers. Larks, much bigger than the English variety, trilled overhead, and monster lizards were basking in the hot sunshine. The scenery answered exactly to the descriptions that Dean Stanley and Professor George Adam Smith have written of the "Maritime Plain." In a eulogistic newspaper article that greatly amused the E.E.F. it was told how the Commander-in-Chief had dashed across the Desert of Sinai, "taking his railway-track and pipe-line with him." A cynical subaltern recalled this phrase one broiling day, as we paddled through clouds of dust where barley-fields had been a month before, and added: "Yes, and he brought the blinking desert with him too!"

Only a few days after we arrived the railway caught us up.

Enormous supply dumps for several divisions spread themselves out on one side of the line, followed a little later by Ordnance with its repair shops, and even its officers' clothing store. On the other side of the line were canteens, the Y.M.C.A., casualty clearing stations, huge parks of motor transport; behind them were the motley hangars of the large aerodrome, and near the village the tents of the headquarters lay in gardens and palm-groves. For miles and miles in every direction the rolling hillsides were covered with bivouacs and horse-lines. All day long huge strings of horses and camels, hundreds at a time, passed to and from the group of wells near the village. Motor ambulances and despatch-riders tore across the fields. Small wonder, then, that in only a week or so the green country that we had entered so cheerfully began to resemble a dusty doormat, for what was left by the Army was soon dried up by the sun.

But that April evening everything looked beautiful. The only sign of military activity in the green valley between the hills was the long line of hospital marquees belonging to the ambulances of the various divisions. The line began at a little enclosed garden, which very soon was utilised for a cemetery, and extended back to Railhead. Behind the hospital marquees and the bivouacs occupied by R.A.M.C. officers and men were the horse-lines, and behind them the various divisional Sanitary Sections encamped as they arrived. The green valley extended some seven miles in a north-easterly direction from this camp, and at its end was visible a minaret appearing among trees over the top of a hill. This was our first sight of Gaza, and we knew that the Turks were not more than four or five miles away from us now. A few days later I walked farther up the valley in their direction, knee-deep in flowers. There was not a sign of life on the way, and bees were buzzing among the sweet-scented blossoms. Not till I reached the *wadi* that we all know so well did I come on a few groups of infantry, sheltered in the clay gullies near it.

But on April 14, early in the morning, our peaceful existence was disturbed by a shelling of the hospitals as well as of Railhead, and on the following day every ambulance had retired to safer sites. From that time the Turks took care to remind us at intervals that they were quite capable of reaching any part of the Deir-el-Belah area with their heavy artillery.



THE WELL IN "ST. JAMES' PARK" BETWEEN DEIR-EL-BELAH AND GAZA.

W. End of Samson's Ridge. Gaza. Ali-el-Muntar.



The "Red House" Garden.

GAZA FROM THE SOUTH.

Lowland Div. Dressing Station.

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The following morning they transferred their attentions to a little garden which the ingenuity of the Higher Command had christened "St. James's Park," containing a well which had previously been known to us of the vulgar herd as "The Garden Well." From my diary I transcribe a few entries in which it is mentioned:

April 5, 1917.—". . . This morning duty (and inclination) took me to visit a well near here, a little farther north, called by our people 'The Garden Well.' And, indeed, there is no other name for it. It stands in a square enclosure bounded by cactus hedges, and containing a great number of orange, lemon, and pomegranate trees. Water from the well is conveyed to all parts of the enclosure in stone channels, obviously of some age. The well itself is very deep and very old, circular in form, and lined with stone as usual. Over it is a pointed stone vault. The water was originally raised by a *sakkiyeh*, or water-wheel, worked by a donkey, such as one sees in Egypt, though there an ox is the beast usually employed. The post supporting the *sakkiyeh* rests on the broken marble capital of a Roman column, and other fragments of marble are lying about. . . .

". . . Here the modest headquarters of two of our brigades were hidden in little bivouacs and holes among the fruit-trees, quite out of sight of the prying eyes of Fritz, who visits us several times a day now. . . ."

April 15.—"While we were up on this ridge they began shelling a place I have described to you before, a beautiful orchard garden with a battery of artillery in front of it, two brigade headquarters within it, and a brigade of infantry in bivouacs behind. For a time they blazed away at the guns, then began to drop shells into the garden. I went in there later to see the results. The pretty orange-trees and pomegranates were knocked about, and there were other things too. . . ."

April 16.—"Among the fruit-trees round the Garden Well I came on some of the tanks that have been such a topic of conversation here for weeks. I had seen them twice before, once arriving on heavy railway-trucks some time ago,

once last night when they rattled behind my tent, great ugly black toads crawling through the darkness. But this time I saw them at close quarters and could peep into their oily insides. What a life for the men working in them, when the thermometer stands at 100° or more in the shade out of doors! They were painted yellow and green and ginger, in order to be as far as possible invisible, and on sand or grass or among foliage they would be, except in bright sunshine. Besides, when stationary they can be covered with a green tarpaulin."

Another group of wells where I spent much of my time lay in a grove of palms between Deir-el-Belah village and the sea, adjoining a large lagoon fringed with reeds. Just before the second battle of Gaza, orders arrived from divisional headquarters that we were to "chlorinate" 3,000 fantasses of water at these wells, beginning within an hour and carrying on continuously for thirty-six hours, when the work must be finished. The chlorinating process is simple enough in theory, and consists in adding a pinch of bleaching powder to each fantass of water, to destroy any germs the latter may contain. But on this occasion it became necessary to devise some formula whereby the powder could be ladled into fantasses at a considerable rate, and we made a solution, in buckets, of such a strength that an ordinary spoonful was the dose for each fantass. The Army knows by bitter experience what result to expect if the Sanitary Section makes the mixture even a fraction too strong. It is curious that over-chlorination is more unpleasant in tea, and perhaps in porridge, than in drinking-water. My men worked at the wells in the palm-groves in shifts of twelve hours. The filling and "parking" of the thousands of heavy fantasses was done by the long-suffering infantry as usual, and I believe other divisions besides my own were carrying out the same preparations.

There were many other wells in the palm-groves between this group and Deir-el-Belah village, some of them used by the native inhabitants still living there. Nearly all of them were covered with a stone pointed arch, but it was difficult to guess the date of these structures. Down by the lagoon was a long range of horse-troughs. The lagoon was separated from the sea by a

narrow strip of sand, and here ships were discharging supplies into surf-boats worked by natives. A short branch line ran from a dump on the beach up to the station at Deir-el-Belah, and much ammunition was landed this way.

When the second attack on Gaza was made, it was confidently expected by the great majority of us that it would be successful. This was not simply the blind optimism of ignorance, but the natural conclusion that we formed from the opinions of those best able to judge. I had already ordered a camera from Cairo, and was chafing at the delay in sending it to me, for I was hoping to photograph the Great Mosque and the other Arab buildings in Gaza.

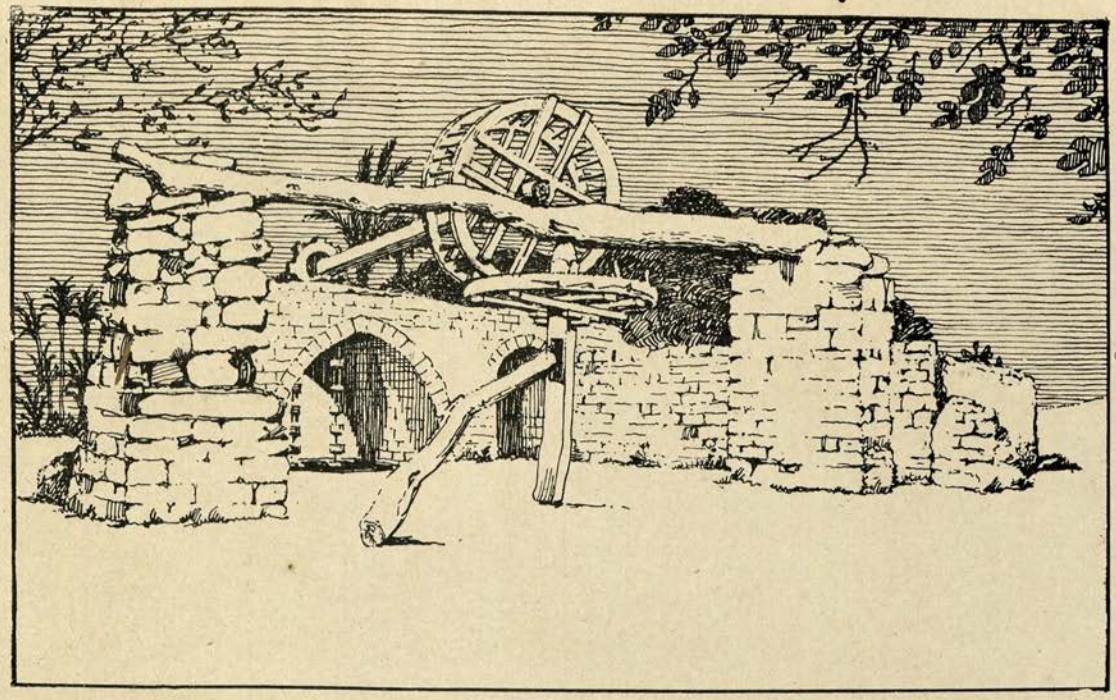
> *April* 16.—". . . Six of my men had to go forward last night as a water-chlorinating party at the advanced wells. They started about 10.45 p.m., and got lost, nearly straying into the Turkish lines, but eventually found their destination among the sand-dunes north of the *wadi*—at a place we call 'Regent's Park,' about 2 a.m. They were lucky in finding dug-outs prepared for them, as they are to live in an R.E. dump. For three hours last night I watched our Army moving forward in the darkness, long lines of infantry and cavalry and transport in clouds of dust that made them even more invisible. . . ."

During the 16th and 17th, the bombardment of Gaza and its powerful defences was in progress, beginning at 5.39 a.m. and continuing until dark, after which it slackened in intensity. From the low cliffs by the sea I watched the heavy guns of monitors and warships firing on to the enemy position. The weather was exceptionally hot, as on the occasions of the previous attack on the city, and dust obscured everything. My thermometer registered 93° in the shade on the 18th, and something approaching a *khamseen* had occured the afternoon before. On the 18th I rode across the *wadi* by one of the many mud-crossings —each with its distinctive number on a sign-board—and visited my men at their various posts. From one of the advanced dressing-stations our men were clearly visible as they struggled through shrapnel-fire over the crest of the great sand-dune known to us as Samson's Ridge, a mile or so ahead.

One of the wells under my charge was at the so-called "Red House" on the north bank of the *wadi*, close to the spot where the railway-bridge stands to-day. The Red House was a large country villa or farm surrounded by pleasant gardens and orchards. Its tiled roof and cypresses made one think of Venetia or Lombardy. But it had already been heavily shelled in the earlier fighting and was never regarded as a health-resort even in these April days.

On April 23 my unit moved forward to "Druid's Ridge," a fine position on a hill near the Garden Well, whence we had a splendid view up the valley to Gaza. On April 25 we moved again, to a point on the beach on the north slope of the hill known as Sheikh Shabasi, close to the mouth of the *wadi*.

> *April* 28.—". . . Ten days ago it was expected that we should have been able to move up into a captured city before this date. But that city was a tough nut, and already you will have heard that trench warfare is to take the place of a triumphal progress. On Monday my little lot had to pack itself up and to move forward to rejoin our divisional ambulances on the green hillside they had occupied a week before. On the whole it was a change for the better. The clouds of dust down by the station and the C.C.S. were getting worse every day, and one hardly ever saw anything more than a few hundred yards away, whereas in the new place we were on cornfields, now rather trampled and distinctly 'white unto harvest' (which is just about due). But there is nobody left to gather in the harvest in all this green countryside. The night of our arrival we were greeted with the Palestine equivalent of the Egyptian *khamseen*, a wild storm of dust being followed by two days of intense heat, the thermometer in my tent ranging from 104° to 110°. . . . Late the next evening I found orders to move yet again, on the following day, to a very jolly place that I will try to picture for you. . . . We are on the sea-beach, about 80 yards from the present edge of the sea, but in a gale it will come almost up to our camp. We have exchanged cornfields and dust for a sandy ledge on a steep cliff, plentifully overgrown with shrubs and wild flowers, overlooking the blue



WELL IN PALM GROVE, DEIR-EL-BELAH.

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Mediterranean. We are on the corner of the cliff, just where a certain rather famous *wadi* enters the sea. On our right is a long sweep of coast. I suppose one can see beyond Ascalon towards Jaffa. Behind the coast-line, between it and the city which is our objective, is a great jumble of sand-dunes, bounded in the distance by a lofty ridge. This ridge is our front line, and between it and the *wadi* is my new sphere of operations, though a few small units still remain near us."

April 29.—". . . One curious result of the violent wind this week was the appearance of butterflies, in flocks of hundreds together, on the seashore, and even in dug-outs and bivouacs. The commonest variety is something between a Red Admiral and a Painted Lady. I have also seen Swallow-tails frequently—yellow, white, and blue varieties like ours at home; and one that rather resembles a Small Copper. There are dragon-flies, locusts, and beetles of all colours. Tortoises are often to be found, and lizards innumerable. I measured one giant lizard that my batman, who is a butcher in private life, had killed and skinned. It was 27 inches from tip to tip."

From our seaside camp for several miles towards Khan Yunus the beach was always crowded with soldiers bathing. The two miles of beach between our camp and the point where the front trenches touched the cliffs, at Sheikh Ajlin, was too much exposed to be a very desirable *plage*. Shells constantly burst there, but whether they were intended for the beach, or "overs" destined for batteries and other units near the edge of the cliffs, we never knew. For several miles, too, the green clay cliffs and the grassy slopes or sand-dunes behind us were covered with bivouacs, including the homes of many of the Resplendent Ones.

The Wadi Ghuzze, or River of Gaza, had a wide bed which, for several miles inland from its mouth, ran between clay banks from 8 to 15 feet high. There was a certain amount of water standing in large pools in this part of its length, but apparently most of the water was underground. Several horse-troughs near the mouth were supplied from this source. The strip of sand between the last pool of fresh water and the sea was treacherous

in parts, and I well remember my horse struggling in it one day when I rode, unsuspectingly, over the place.

A few hundred yards from the sea, on the north bank of the *wadi*, rose a steep little hill of bold outline. We called this colloquially "The Caves," but its proper name was *Tell-el-Ajjul* ("The Calf's Mound"). Here for a long time two of our divisional ambulances were quartered in gullies, and in front of them was one of the most hardworked of our heavy batteries. At the foot of the cliff was a marshy tract full of reeds and mosquitoes, close to which the transport lines were placed. The hill itself is probably natural, but the sides appear to have been artificially scarped. Several caves or tombs are excavated in its sides. Souvenir-hunters groping for treasure found ancient beads and glass. But in 1880 a large seated statue of Jupiter was found here. It is now in the museum at Constantinople, and a sketch of it by Colonel Conder appears in the Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund for 1882. The figure was sawn across the knees, perhaps to facilitate its removal. Some day this site should be systematically excavated, as tradition tells of buried treasure there. A phantom calf is said to guard it; hence its Arabic name. Tell-el-Ajjul may represent the ancient *Anthecdon*, and it is possible that a temple once stood here, but when it was explored by Guèrin no traces of buildings were found.

Between Tell-el-Ajjul and the "Red House," already described, lies "Middlesex Farm," where, again, one of my men was stationed for water-duties. It is typical of the large sort of farmhouse in the district, but I was told that in reality it was a *khan* or *caravanserai* such as one reads of, at Gaza, in Kinglake's "Eothen." The following note from my own diary describes these farmhouses:

> *May* 6, 1917.—". . . Many of them—now deserted and in some cases shattered by shell-fire—stand in large gardens or orchards enclosed by cactus hedges. This farmhouse itself usually consists of a range of rooms grouped round an open courtyard, and one of the 'rooms' is a stone pointed vault over a deep stone-lined well. In the courtyard stands the great horizontal wheel of the well apparatus, resting on a

stout post, and turned by another post stuck slantwise into the vertical one. This is worked by a donkey or an ox. In many cases, of course, this old system has been superseded by up-to-date German machinery, even by oil-engines! In other cases the wells were blown up before we arrived. But the clumsy old wooden wheel and posts still remain."

Going north from Tell-el-Ajjul, one crossed the lofty sand-dune known as Samson's Ridge before reaching Gaza. On the farther side of this ridge were our front trenches from the second battle in April, 1917, to the third battle in November of the same year. The view from these trenches will live long in the memory of those who inhabited them during the summer. One looked down across sand-dunes and trees to the red roofs and minarets of the city, rising from the belt of gardens that is its chief beauty.

Of Gaza itself I can write nothing from actual experience, for I had left Palestine before our troops entered the city at last. Nor is it necessary to say much of it here, for its history has already been traced elsewhere, and the object of this little book is rather to throw some light on places that are not household words. The Man in the Street, whose geography is usually of a nebulous order, and the Man at the Base, who is often little better informed, always talked of the small slice of Palestine that we occupied so long as "Gaza." Khan Yunus, Deir-el-Belah, and Shellal—the obscure places we really inhabited—were seldom mentioned. But to those who sat and looked at Gaza, from two to five miles away, it seemed very distant indeed. There were many people in the E.E.F. during the summer of 1917 who never expected to see the inside of Gaza, including a few men who had actually been in its streets during the March battle. "So near and yet so far" expressed their point of view. But a fortnight or so after its capture the Cairo cinemas were exhibiting films of *La Chute de Gazza* to cheering crowds.

Why is it that Gaza has always figured so prominently in military history, ever since history began? Dean Stanley, writing in the days when Turkey was our very dear friend, speaks of the long grassy valley leading up to Gaza from the *wadi*, bare of cover, and thus forming an admirable defence for the

city against an enemy approaching from Egypt. Lord Kitchener, whose knowledge of Palestine can only be appreciated by those who have studied the wonderful maps and illustrated memoirs he prepared with Colonel Conder when a subaltern in the R.E., is reported to have said that a modern force attacking Palestine from the south-west would be held on the Gaza-Beersheba line. To some extent, therefore, the explanation must be found in military geography. Gaza has always been a frontier city. Sometimes Palestine was considered to be bounded on the south by the Wadi Ghuzze, at other times by the Wadi-el-Arish, which wanders across Sinai "like a varicose vein," as a friend once said to me.

Gaza is mentioned twenty times in the Old Testament and once in the New. It lay on "the border of the Canaanites" at the very beginning of history. In the Books of Joshua and Judges it is mentioned many times as one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. In Gaza stood the Temple of Dagon, the fish-god, a patron of agriculture and one of the principal Philistine deities. This was the temple that Samson is supposed to have destroyed in his final feat of strength. The story of Samson has, however, been told so often to the long-suffering soldier during the campaign that there is no need to repeat it here. A more interesting touch of local colour was usually added, perhaps originated by some ingenious *padre* in the E.E.F., attributing the credit for Delilah's birth to Khan Yunus. I have never been able to trace this story to its inventor, but it appeared to me that the girls of Khan Yunus have remained true to type, if it is founded on fact. They are in many cases wicked-looking damsels.

References in the Bible, after the Samson legend, generally refer to Gaza as a frontier-city, captured and lost by one King after another. For that reason they are not very interesting. Jeremiah (xlvii. 5) coins an original phrase when he observes: "Baldness is come upon Gaza." Nebuchadnezzar appears to have been responsible for this unfortunate occurrence, in the seventh century B.C., baldness being a token of mourning. But long before his time—indeed, fifteen hundred years before our era—the Egyptian Kings had fought for the city. Gaza was the centre of the great conflict between Assyria and Egypt.

Professor G. A. Smith explains the reason for these constant struggles:

> "The eight days' march across the sand from the Delta requires that, if an army came up that way into Syria, Gaza, being their first relief from the desert, should be in friendly hands. Hence the continual efforts of Egypt to hold the town."

For two months in 332 B.C. it resisted a siege by Alexander the Great. Twenty years later it was demolished by Ptolemy I. Other sieges followed, notably that of 96 B.C., when the city at last fell, through treachery, after a year's fighting. And so the dreary chronicle of war goes on. Occasionally one gets a glimpse of something else besides fighting. Professor G. A. Smith speaks of the city's schools:

> "In the second and third centuries (A.D.) Gaza became a prosperous centre of Greek commerce and culture. Her schools were good, but her temples were famous, circling round the Marneion. . . . The schools of Gaza in philosophy and rhetoric grew more and more distinguished. Students, it is said, left Athens to learn the Attic style in Philistia, and even Persia borrowed her teachers."

Then came a long period when the struggles of conflicting armies gave place to conflicts between Christians and upholders of its pagan faith. St. Porphyrius was Bishop of Gaza in the early years of the fifth century. In A.D. 635 the Arabs captured the city, and for nine hundred years afterwards battles and sieges follow at intervals.

But Gaza did not play a foremost part in the Crusades, the chief stronghold of the Franks being a few miles north, at Ascalon. Instead of following any further the seesaw fortunes of the city during these wars, it is more interesting to consider the important building that it possesses, now known as the Great Mosque, but originally erected by the Crusaders in the twelfth century, as a Christian Church dedicated to St. John. Materials from older buildings were utilised, as was so often the case. Among these older fragments is a bas-relief representing the

seven-branched candlestick, with inscriptions in Hebrew and Greek. The walls and ceiling are whitewashed, but in former days were probably decorated with frescoes. The three apses have been built up to make room for the tall octagonal minaret that used to look at us over the top of the sandhills when we were encamped in the cornfields near Deir-el-Belah. The west doorway is a beautiful example of Italian Gothic, and should be compared with the portal of En Nasir's tomb in Cairo, brought from the Crusaders' church at Acre in Syria, which is similar in style. "Lieutenant Kitchener" photographed this doorway at Gaza, also the interior of the mosque, and made a plan of the building, in 1874. His illustrations and notes appeared in the elaborate "Memoirs of the Palestine Exploration Fund" (vol. iii.). Since our Army and Navy bombarded Gaza, these records have an additional interest.

For many centuries after the Crusades Gaza figures but little in history. At intervals it seems to have been "completely destroyed"! Sir John Mandeville visited it in 1332, and speaks of it as "a gay and rich city; and it is very fair and full of people, and is but a little distance from the sea."

Napoleon, whose advance across Sinai has already been described in some detail in this book, left Khan Yunus for Gaza on February 25, 1799, and I now give a translation of Lacroix's account of the subsequent happenings:

> "At a distance of $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles [from Khan Yunus; on February 25, 1799] the army encountered Abd-Allah's advance-guard, and took several of them prisoners. Abd-Allah covered the town of Gaza. He had received reinforcements; under his banner he numbered 12,000 men, of whom 6,000 were cavalry. He was expecting every moment that the army of the Aga of Jerusalem would arrive, as well as 14 guns from the artillery-park at Jaffa. That would bring his numbers up to 20,000 men. At 3 p.m. the two armies found themselves arrayed opposite one another. Abd-Allah's right rested on a great hill, known as the 'Hill of Hebron,' where Samson carried the gates of Gaza. This hill is situated opposite Gaza, and is separated from it by a valley 700 or 800 fathoms wide. His cavalry was all on the

left. He did not occupy the town of Gaza, but only the fort, where he had some heavy guns.

"Bonaparte, following his ordinary tactics, formed each of his divisions into a square. He gave the left to Kleber, the centre to General Bon. All the cavalry, under Murat, held the right, and, as their numbers were inferior, they were supported by three squares of infantry under Lannes. The patrols brought in several prisoners, who stated that the Aga of Jerusalem had not yet arrived, and that the artillery from Jaffa had not yet left that place, owing to lack of transport. Abd-Allah had not, therefore, more than 10,000 or 12,000 men and two guns; he was not a very redoubtable foe. General Kleber charged through in the valley between Gaza and the enemy's right, and bore down on his rear. The cavalry, supported by the squares of General Lannes, turned the left flank; while General Bon, with the centre, made a frontal attack. As soon as the nature of these movements was apparent, the Turks retreated, evacuating all their positions. Ibrahim Bey's Mamelukes bore themselves with courage; they launched three squadrons at General Murat's column, but, caught on the flank, they were scattered. The *Tchorbadjis* were a little better than the Arabs, though far inferior to the Mamelukes, and quite unable to measure themselves against the dragoons, though they had triple the numbers of the latter. The dragoons pursued the enemy for five miles, close on his heels. But the Turks are very nimble; they had no equipment, and only two guns, which they abandoned. Ibrahim Bey's Mamelukes covered the retreat. Abd-Allah lost 2,000 or 3,000 men. The French Army had some 60 men killed, wounded, and taken prisoners."

Part of the above passage, taken from Lacroix's book already quoted in these pages, appears to be an extract from Napoleon's own "Memoirs," but it is not clear where the extract begins. On March 13, 1799, he wrote as follows to the *Directoire* of the Gaza victory:

". . . The 22nd Light Infantry have done very well; they followed the horse at the double, though for many days they had never had a proper meal nor drunk water in comfort.

> We entered Gaza; we found there . . . large stocks of ammunition . . . more than 200,000 biscuit rations, and six guns. The weather was shocking, much thunder and rain; never since we left France have we had a single storm. . . ."

Lacroix continues that the Sheikhs and *ulemas* of Gaza brought the keys of the town, that the proclamation of the *divan* of El-Azhar in Cairo had a great effect on the native population, and that the fort, with the artillery and other contents, was surrendered at daybreak next morning.

> "The army camped in the orchards around the town; the heights were occupied by detached forts. The commander-in-Chief pitched his tent on the 'Hill of Hebron.' The fertility of the district was now realised. The army remained there four days to recover from the fatigue of crossing the desert; there was an abundance of food, and that of excellent quality."

Such was the last attack on Gaza before the three battles of 1917.

From Gaza two tracks lead southwards. One passes under the *Bab-ed-Darum*, and thence goes to Deir-el-Belah; the other under the *Bab-el-Muntar* to that famous hill, Ali-el-Muntar, where Samson is said to have carried the gates of the Philistines (Judges xvi. 3). The height of the hill, some 270 feet, is not remarkable. It is crowned by a *mukam* sacred to Ali of the Watch-Tower. All round lie Moslem graves among trees. But no man who spent any part of the summer of 1917 outside Gaza will forget Ali-el-Muntar. It was indeed a watch-tower. It gazed at us wherever we went. It could see every train that arrived at Deir-el-Belah Railhead, every aëroplane that rolled out of its hangar for an airing, every car and convoy that came up to the *wadi*, and, in short, all the doings of the most important part of our Army. It was very fond of talking to its friends the artillery, too, and went on talking when huge shells from the warships were blowing its sandy graves sky-high. As long as ever I think of Gaza, I shall associate it with that storied and accursed hill.

CHAPTER XIV

LIFE IN THE WADI GHUZZE

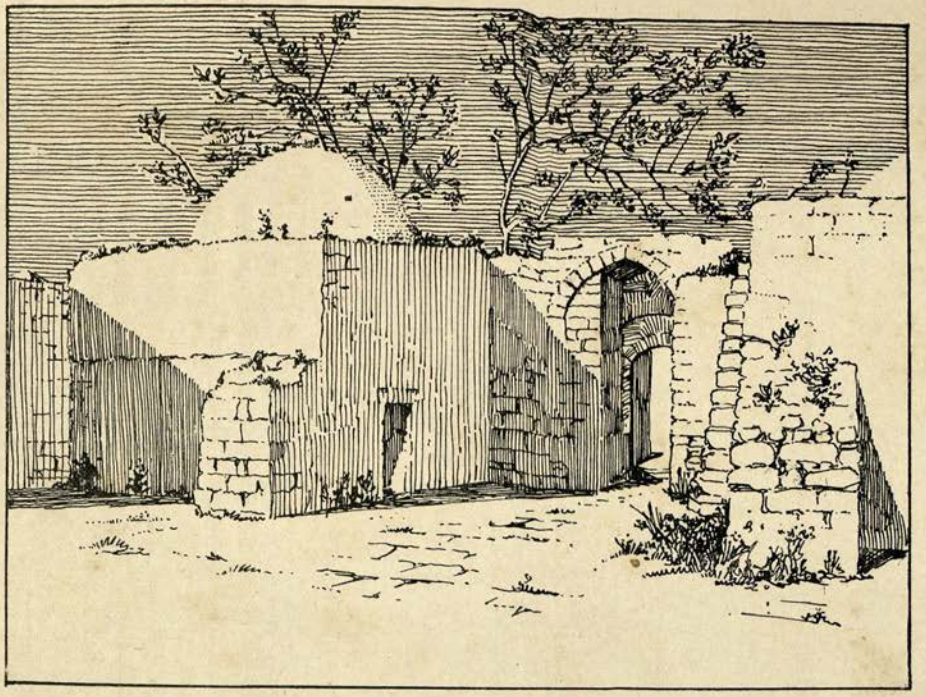
A LARGE part of the time that I spent in Palestine was occupied in moving from one camp to another, in loading and unloading a long string of camels, in hunting for rations and water at each new place, and in digging ourselves in on arrival. We moved ten times in nine weeks, and each move meant at least three days' disorganisation of work. It might be argued that this gipsy life enabled us to see the country. If the country had been worth seeing, that line of argument would perhaps have appealed to us.

But the country in the neighbourhood of the *wadi* had ceased to be attractive since the Army arrived. In early spring and in normal times it must be a pleasant place, though in no way romantic. The wide grassy valley between Deir-el-Belah and Gaza, for example, remained almost unspoiled north of the big camp at Deir-el-Belah itself, for it was commanded by the observation-posts on Ali Muntar, and was well within range of Turkish heavy artillery. Our troops bivouacked for months in fig-groves and among little sandhills, or in deep gullies in the slopes of green uplands. So when we trekked across the open barley-fields on May 8, *en route* for our new camp at Sheikh Nebhan over the opposite hill, we found a large herd of cattle peacefully grazing in the bottom of the valley, where the telegraph-posts and the old track from Egypt to Palestine still remained just as in pre-war days. There was very little traffic along the bottom of this valley, on account of its exposed position, though it was the obvious way from Railhead to the front. Every convoy that crossed it could be shelled from Gaza if the Turks thought fit, and it was worth while sending a string of camels and men across on the instalment system rather than as a compact target.

On the top of the ridge east of this valley, separating it from the other valley where Sheikh Nebhan and the *wadi* lay, numerous tracks crossed each other, some of them dug in rock, others deep in dust. All the top of that hill was a wilderness of dust and desolation, but it had been green not long before. Caterpillar tractors were now very numerous, and rattled up and down the country night and day. Descending to Sheikh Nebhan, one passed enclosed gardens and lines of trenches, and near one of these gardens we were ordered to make our next home. My diary describes the neighbourhood:

> *May* 13, 1917.—". . . The country round here is by no means flat, but very hilly indeed, all crumpled up into narrow gulleys or nullahs, with slopes of grass—now turning brown in the sun—or patches of clay between. Dotted about on the yellow or brown or greenish slopes are little enclosed patches of cultivation, and by one of these we were encamped. It is typical of most of them. Imagine a little orchard of fig-trees and sprawling vines, surrounded by a ditch and a clay bank 2 feet high. On the far side is a ramshackle mud hut, its roof collapsed. On the lee-side of the garden—the side farthest from the Turks, that is—we have dug various holes in which we live. . . .
>
> "A few yards farther down the ditch is the so-called 'orderly-room,' a cubical hole 6 feet each way, with a top made of corrugated iron covered with a few inches of earth."

This description of our quarters is quoted in full, as picturing the type of dwelling that most people in the E.E.F. occupied at this time, unless they were close to the front line, in which case there was rather better protection. But that week, when we moved to Sheikh Nebhan, had been the occasion of much hostile "aerial activity," and special precautions were being taken. The fifty natives that I had to bring in my train were by this time experienced in the meaning of both bombs and shells. Some corrugated iron had been found in disused dug-outs about a mile away. The E.L.C. men brought down a number of sheets of this, and constructed a whole row of excellent burrows for themselves, just behind our bivouacs, to which they resorted at a



SHEIKH NEBHAN, NEAR GAZA.

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great pace when the double whistle blew. But some of them prided themselves on their coolness, and grouped themselves in negligent attitudes when everybody else was imitating a rabbit. Every unit received orders to dig deep, narrow trenches close to its bivouacs, and as a result the whole countryside gradually became honeycombed with dug-outs and trenches. This added to the difficulties of a horseman, whose progress was already impeded by countless signal-wires on the ground. If these wires were really on the ground there was no obstruction—a horse stepped on them or over them—but in the barley-fields they were sometimes as much as a foot off the ground, and even my tractable nag was constantly getting tangled in them.

I messed with two medical officers whose dressing-station and bivouacs adjoined mine. The "mess" was about 7 feet square, and a yard or more below ground. Their two "beds" served as seats, and the table was a block of earth covered with a ground sheet as tablecloth. We were not allowed to live in the adjoining orchard, for the authorities were very solicitous about the rights of the native owners, but I picketed my horse there, under the welcome shade of one of the larger trees. One day I was summoned to interview the owner, who had come from Khan Yunus—where there was a refugee encampment—to see to his property. He was a picturesque old fellow, rather like a Minor Prophet, and produced his permit for inspection, with a photograph of himself.

> ". . . I suppose that to a stranger the most striking thing out here would be the plague of flies, which are far worse than I ever knew them to be in Egypt. But though on the Canal one was able to do something towards countering the pest, I don't think it is very practicable here. This Army is now large and scattered, dotted about everywhere and anywhere in odd holes and corners, living in most primitive fashion without any of the meat-safes and little civilities that one could always get on the Canal last summer.
>
> "There is a good deal of other live stock about—scorpions, ants, lizards, snails, small snakes, and beetles of every size and kind. Nothing has tackled me yet, but one always expects to be bitten by something or other. So far the

mosquitoes have not been troublesome, but I know where a lot of them are breeding.

"Yesterday I visited another little enclosed garden near here where there is a Sheikh's tomb. The garden is surrounded by tall cactus hedges, now covered with brilliant yellow and orange flowers, and within are a few trees and bushes. Inside the garden is the grave of "an enemy sniper," this description being pencilled in plain English on a bit of board. The building consists of a few rooms grouped round a small courtyard. One contains nothing, the next a few mats and a dead cat, the third a dilapidated tomb, and the fourth a tomb that is evidently still an object of veneration, for crude coloured curtains still surround it. But there are fragments of ancient marble, and carved capitals of very early date, built into the walls, and over each of the tomb-chambers is one of those shallow white domes that are so familiar a feature in all Moslem villages."

This was the tomb of the Sheikh Nebhan, that gave the locality a distinguishing name. It is thought by Colonel Conder, who visited this obscure spot in 1875 when surveying the district, that the small paved courtyard once formed the nave and aisle of a Christian church, for the bases of three pillars still remain. ("P.E.F. Memoirs," vol. iii., pp. 252-253).

On the other side of the *wadi* is a place called Umm-Jerrar, which is believed to be the site of the *Gerar* of the Old Testament. Gerar is one of the earliest of the patriarchal settlements referred to in the story of Abraham and Isaac. The name occurs several times in Genesis, especially in chapter xxvi.:

Verse 1: "And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar."

Verse 6: "And Isaac dwelt in Gerar. . . . (Here follow certain domestic details.)

Verse 17: "And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there."

Verse 18: "And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father;

for the Philistines had stopped them after the days of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them."

Verse 19: "And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water."

Verse 20: "And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek, because they strove with him."

Reading these passages, one wonders whether the Philistines "stopped" the wells, as the Turks did at Rafa and elsewhere early in 1917, by throwing down into them the stonework surrounding them. At Rafa our engineers fished up fragments of marble columns with spiral flutings, that are said to have formed part of a Roman well-head. At Umm-Jerrar nowadays there is little more to see than a few rock-cisterns with domed roofs of rubble masonry. Fragments of glass have been found there, and a small piece of mosaic pavement, which is mentioned later in this chapter. Enormous heaps of broken pottery lie on the neighbouring slopes, and there is no doubt that this pottery is, for the most part, very ancient. All along the "Oldest Road in the World" I was struck by the same thing, a sure evidence of the multitudes who traversed it in bygone days. There is said to have been a monastery at Gerar in the early centuries of our era, and one Marcion, Bishop of Gerar, was a signatory of the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

The *wadi* near Sheikh Nebhan ran between high clay banks, and at intervals wells were sunk, from which our thousands of camels, as well as horses and men, were watered. The official report spoke of 30,000 camels being used by our Army at the time, and horses were probably as numerous, while the number of men may be ascertained by an intelligent reading of despatches. The water problem was, in fact, more important than any other. Each division or brigade had its own watering area, with an officer in charge who lived in a dug-out close to the wells. A fatigue-party of infantry was detailed to live with him and to work the pumps; while my unit supplied one man to each brigade for chlorinating purposes, also a mounted sergeant who rode round to see that the chlorination was properly done. All day and all night the

wells were busy. Each group was surrounded with a light wire fence and plainly labelled with its owner's name.

One day I found a derelict Turkish disinfector in the *wadi*. It had been commandeered by another Sanitary Section three months earlier, in the El Arish operations, and had been constantly in use. It bore the name of a firm in Vienna, and seemed to me to be far better adapted for rough country than the pattern we used, which had only single shafts.

As one went farther up the *wadi*, away from Gaza and the sea, an isolated hill of bold outline came into view. This was Tell-el-Jemmi—commonly called "Jimmy" for short—and the padres endeavoured to weave a story about it. It is said that a human skeleton was found there with crossed knees, indicating that he was a Crusader. To the unimaginative it appears as a large flat-topped bare mound, but the sides are steep, and may well have been artificially scarped. Here, again, pottery is abundant.

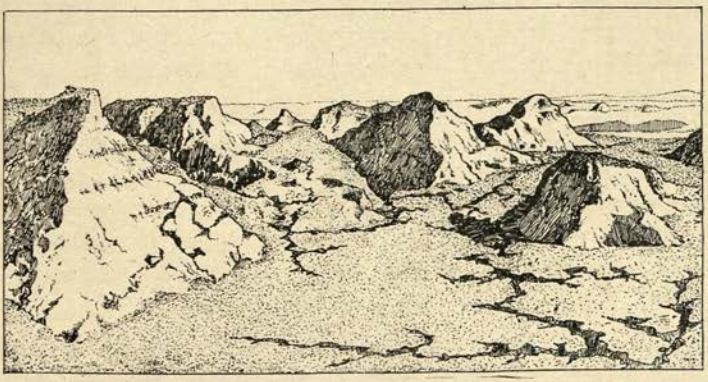
Another day I rode round this neighbourhood, and found a small Sheikh's tomb on the hillside south of Tell-el-Jemmi, marked on the map as *Sheikh Nakhrur*. I had no time for sketching, and was cumbered with a horse, but it struck me then that the little building might possibly yield something to an antiquary. On the top of this hill was a finely situated hamlet, El Izraa'in. It had no features of interest, but the group of trees among which it stood was visible many miles away.

Opposite Sheikh Nebhan, where we were living, a branch of the main Wadi Ghuzze, known as the Wadi Nukhabar, ran east towards Hareira. A mile or so from the junction was a large plain building, which by the whim of the Staff had been christened "Dorset House."

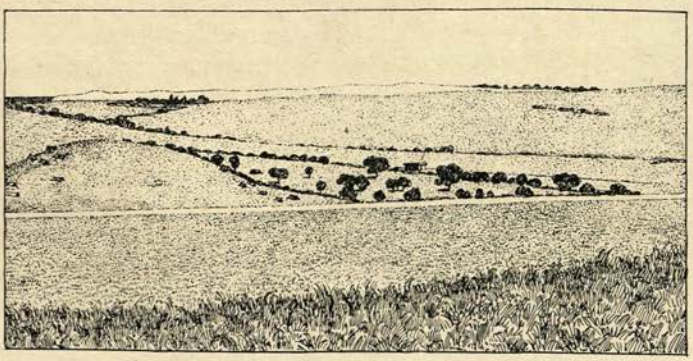
On the afternoon of May 26 we started trekking again. My unit had now dwindled to ten men, and each time we moved we had to tie all our considerable equipment on to camels, varying in number from fourteen to twenty. If we had only fourteen, five of them were required to carry drums of disinfectant, one for blankets and coats, one for my own property and the "orderly-room," one for water, one for our food and cooking utensils, and the remaining five for our apparatus, including a heavy tool-chest and a "portable" water-clarifier.



SHEIKH NEBHAN FROM WADI-EL-GLUZZE.



CLIFFS AT HISEIA NEAR SHELLAL.



VIEW FROM BIVOUAC AT SHEIKH NEBHAN.

To face page 264.

"The distance we had to travel was about nine miles, but I had rehearsed more than half of it the previous day, so for that part we had no difficulty. We traversed rolling country very like the Yorkshire Moors in its bareness, but nearly all covered with corn of sorts and broken up by deep clay gullies which took some dodging, as they are only crossable at certain points.

"Out here you have only a very short twilight, and then comes the dark. At sunset we reached a hill-top with a long view, and thence we could see another hill which was somewhere near our destination. All this time we had been following rough tracks through perfectly deserted country. My orders were to march to a certain point on the map. I never expected to find it exactly till dawn came, but I think we bivouacked near the spot, though the country was absolutely featureless, and there was not a soul to be seen or heard. As it happened, the order I got to go there, though it cancelled a previous one, was quite wrong, so it didn't matter much. We lay down and slept where we were. One of the men said something rather smart as he looked up at the stars—'Fine ceiling, isn't it?'

"I woke up at 4.30 and roused my snoring crowd. While breakfast was a-making, I set off to find anybody who knew where anybody was. Of course they didn't; besides, we were a mile from the nearest bivouac. After an hour or two I ran into my chief, who was looking for me in a very cheerful way.

"We spent the afternoon digging ourselves in, but in the evening more orders arrived. Somebody had found a mosquito in the *wadi*, and we had to move there the next afternoon. Meanwhile the D.A.C. and the R.A.M.C. had discovered each other, and the former had received notice to quit.

"The following morning I had to be up early to ride down to the *wadi* with —— to hunt for mosquitoes. Then back to the ambulance to finish our weary old packing up once more, and at last we got down to our new pitch in the *wadi* about 8.30 p.m."

The moves described above were from Sheikh Nebhan via El Izraa'in to Weli Sheikh Nuran, and thence to Hiseia. At Sheikh Nuran the only feature of interest was the hill of that name, with a very extensive view in all directions, and the remarkable system of defences left by the Turks. These consisted of a series of deep circular pits, so far as I remember about 6 feet in diameter and 1 foot apart, in place of the usual trenches. Hiseia is simply a group of wells in the wildest part of the *wadi*.

June 1, 1917.—". . . We have left the sand-dunes by the sea, the plain where we were previously, and the corn-clad uplands. We are now living in a small gulley that runs into the *wadi*. All round us are great clay cliffs with precipitous sides and of every weird shape, not unlike the Grand Cañon of Colorado as you see it in picture-books. We must be twelve miles from the mouth of this *wadi*, and almost as much from the sea at its nearest point. Military conditions are very different, too, for we are five miles ahead of Division H.Q., three miles ahead of Brigade H.Q. and the dressing stations, and even ahead of some of the battalion H.Q.'s. In fact, we are close to 'the wire.' Yet it is a very quiet place, and one only hears distant guns occasionally. I doubt whether we shall see or hear shell-fire while we stay here. You will be able to form your own conclusions as to the state of affairs on this part of the line. Our chief trouble will be with the dust and the heat, which is very oppressive for about seven hours every day, and the flies, which swarm. Every gully along the *wadi* bank seems to have been bivouacked in by the Anzacs. I always fancy I can tell an Anzac rubbish-heap by the empty chicken-tins. Our Tommies can't afford tinned chicken!

"And now about work. In the gravelly bed of the *wadi* is quite a lot of water—at one end of my beat in fast-flowing streams, at this end in pools where the current is slower. In nearly all these pools a malaria mosquito is breeding. The 'Fly-Major,' of whom I have spoken to you before under that name, has prepared a scheme which I have to carry out with the aid of my men and my gang of natives. Briefly, it consists of getting rid of all vegetable slime and of all

shallow and stagnant pools by canalising the water-channels, and then in oiling the surface to kill the larvæ by preventing them from breathing. The length of the beat is perhaps two miles or a little less."

One has heard of sergeant-majors and Brigade-Majors in this war, drum-majors in military textbooks, and galloping majors in music-halls. But the "Fly-Major" is a product of the present Armageddon. At home he is an eminent entomologist; when with the E.E.F. he sets forth on a morning pilgrimage of hate, seeking *Musca domestica*, or *Anopheles Turkhudi*, or *Stegomyia fasciata*, that he may put it in a bottle and write a report about it. Then, sooner or later, a *billet-doux* is forwarded to the nearest Sanitary Section, who pour oil on the waters.

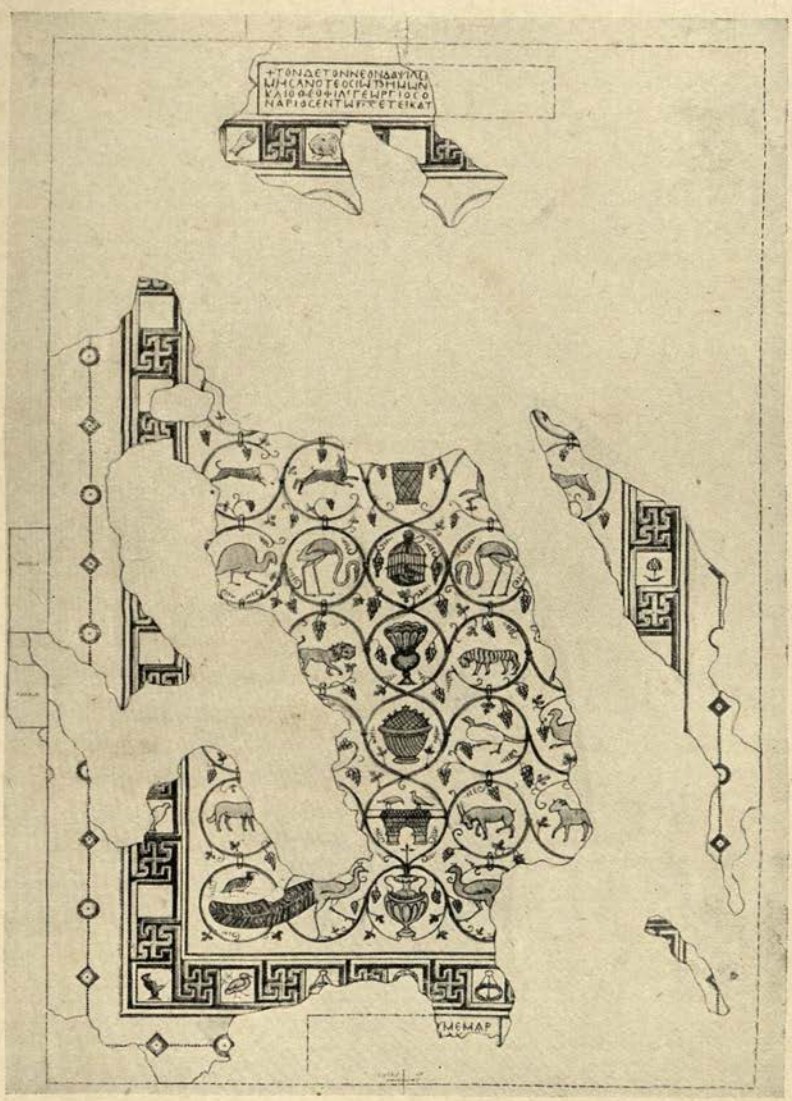
From Hiseia the chain of water-pools and wells extended for about a mile and a half to Shellal. This part of the *wadi* was very desolate and wild, with great clay cliffs fissured into gullies on either hand. At Shellal, which is an Arabic name meaning "waterfall" or "cascade," we saw real fast-running water for the first time since landing in Egypt. It was almost exciting to find little streams tumbling over stony ledges down to the *wadi*. At the important crossing at Shellal were a few ruined buildings of uncertain age, domed with brickwork that may have been Roman. A Padre tried to connect Shellal with the Ziklag of the Bible, but authorities place the latter site many miles farther north, beyond the Wadi-es-Sheria, which is presumably the "Brook Besor" mentioned in 1 Sam. xxx. 21. In fact, the only Biblical associations that we can definitely attribute to this corner of Palestine are connected with Gaza and Gerar, and so far from shedding a halo on our young Crusaders, they are eminently unsuitable for "the young person."

Nevertheless, Shellal is closely connected with early Christianity. On June 3 I began sketching a mosaic pavement that had been discovered a few days earlier on the top of a little hill close to the *wadi* crossing. This was, by great good luck, within a few hundred yards of the principal place where my mosquito-trapping duties lay. By the courtesy of the Editors of the *Burlington Magazine* I am allowed to quote part of an article that I wrote for that journal, describing the "find":

"The mosaic was first found by an Australian officer who was examining the summit of the hill on which it lay. This hill, though of no great elevation, commanded the Shellal crossing; and the Turks—who had occupied it up to a few weeks before—had dug a trench round the summit and made a machine-gun emplacement there. In so doing they had revealed a portion of the pavement which had previously been covered by clay and débris, and they must have considerably damaged the remains. When the mosaic was discovered by our troops, the work of superintending the excavation was undertaken by a chaplain attached to the Anzac division. Arrangements were made for drawings to be prepared, and my own sketching there was entirely unofficial. When I first saw the pavement, on June 1 or 2, it was nearly all uncovered, but on comparison of my own drawing with those made by the Australians, I find that parts of it must have been either broken up or wantonly removed during the few days before I first saw it. According to the earlier drawings, the two peacocks (shown at the bottom of the pavement on the plate) were both complete, and the inscription below them was decipherable for nine lines instead of two, as shown on my drawing.

"The work of removing the mosaic was commenced just after I arrived, and lasted for two or three weeks, the chaplain taking charge. It was skilfully and carefully done. When the foundation had been removed square by square, each square of mosaic was carefully lifted and placed on a bed of freshly made plaster of Paris in a shallow deal case. These cases were finally removed to Cairo on June 20. When last I heard of them, the question of the ultimate resting-place of the mosaic had not been decided.

"The operations of clearing the mosaic and removing it were carried out under considerable difficulties, though not within range of enemy guns, as a vivid journalistic account hinted! Aeroplanes certainly hovered over our heads every day, but the thousands of horses and camels at the neighbouring water-troughs would have tempted their bombs more readily than half a dozen figures on a little hill. The chief drawback was the almost incessant cloud of dust, which blew



MOSAIC PAVEMENT AT SHELLAL.

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all the débris over the pavement as fast as it could be cleared. This made drawing almost impossible at times, and obliterated the rich colouring as well as the outline of the design.

"This mosaic pavement was undoubtedly a most valuable 'find.' The composition is both spirited and delicate, the technique is superb. Historically it should be considered as an important addition to the remains of a somewhat obscure period. A copy of the inscription at the top of the illustration was submitted to Mr. A. H. Smith, of the British Museum, who translated the portion of it still existing as follows: '*X* (*Sign of the Cross*). *This temple with spacious* (*? foundations*) *was built by our most holy* (*bishop or similar title*) *and most pious George* —— *in the year* 622 *according to* —— (*? the year of Gaza*).'

"The discoverers of the mosaic have sought to identify this George of Shellal with St. George of Cappadocia, the patron saint of England. But in so doing they aroused a good deal of criticism and not a very edifying duel of letters in the Egyptian Press. The newspapers seized on St. George as an excellent excuse for headlines as unjustifiable as modern headlines usually are, and views of the mosaic are sold in Cairo bearing the modest legend: 'Anzac St. George Mosaic, Palestine!' The year 622 in the era of Gaza is equivalent to A.D. 561-562.

"I have myself seen photographs of a mosaic found at Umm Jerrar (the *Gerar* of the Old Testament), between Shellal and Gaza, since I left Palestine. It is much smaller and less refined in detail than the Shellal example, but it resembles the latter in having many naturalistic figures of animals introduced into the design.

"The symbolism of the various beasts and birds represented in the numerous panels is probably capable of interpretation by those learned in such matters. There seems to be no doubt that the central *motif* is the Vine, springing from a chalice in the central panel of the lowest row.

"The site chosen for erecting this little church, with its wonderful mosaic floor, is a strange one, in a wild and lonely gorge. The neighbourhood of Shellal and Hiseia wells, and of a road across the *wadi* that many travellers must have

taken as they went from Egypt towards Jerusalem, may have been the cause. As they reached the fissured cliffs that form the banks of the *wadi*, they would gaze at this little sanctuary perched on its prominent mound."

But for the interest of this discovery, life in the *wadi* during the summer of 1917 was dull indeed. Fritz dropped a few bombs on the bivouacs on the opposite bank just after we arrived, and paid us a call once or twice daily just to assure himself we were still there. But he is alleged to have dropped one of his famous missives somewhere in the area about this time, stating that two of the best Hun pilots were away on a fortnight's leave, so that we might look forward to a little respite.

Things were so ridiculously peaceful then that anybody could look out through "the wire" over miles of green fields to the hills between Gaza and Beersheba, at least ten miles away, where the Turks were. I have seen the distant smoke of a train on their railway. Each side used to send out reaping-parties for a mile or two into the corn, escorted by one or two horsemen and an interpreter. These funny little processions of Bedouin families and camels often crossed the *wadi*, near Hiseia, early in the morning, and returned after a long day.

Among our neighbours was an Indian battery that greatly enjoyed firing at Fritz. They were known locally as "the Bing Boys." They had long hair, and were rather a trial to the A.S.C., as their religion forbade them to eat any tinned foods. But in another respect it was distinctly helpful. Some of them were not allowed to drink, others did not smoke. A profitable exchange of cigarettes for alcoholic beverages was thus possible. Another Indian unit that I have often met excels in making tumblers out of bottles, but the method of cutting the bottles in half with string has already been explained in some handbook for Boy Scouts.

All sorts of devices were tried to relieve the tedium of these hot and dusty days. Down at Khan Yunus, where the Upper Ten and their satellites lived, the favourite sport was scorpion fights. One mess would challenge another to send a scorpion to fight their tame tarantula spider, and much money changed hands at these events. Sometimes, I believe, teams of scorpions were

specially trained. There had been a real race-meeting near Rafa earlier in the year, but some alleged military operations prevented most of the infantry divisions, or the rank and file of them, from attending. In one ambulance mess with whom I often lived there was a "dulcitone," a sort of emasculated piano, which one could carry under one's arm. When argument at the table became unduly heated, the Colonel—who was a good musician as well as a good fellow—would turn round on his camp-stool in the tiny dug-out and play some plaintive air on the miniature keyboard. This dulcitone was somehow conveyed everywhere, when luggage was limited. It is an affair of tuning-forks, and like the loud-voiced gramophone that one often hears in R.A.M.C. messes, it came under the convenient heading of "medical comforts."

In the *wadi* there was always some difficulty in getting rations, as we were five miles from the A.S.C. dump and had no transport. We were dependent on the willingness of a dressing-station nearly three miles away to bring our scanty victuals and fuel. Any parcels from home that escaped the submarines were thus doubly welcome. I remember censoring a letter of thanks for one of the parcels:

"DEAR BROTHER AND SISTER,

"I ham sorry the cake you sent me was bad I ham sorry. . . ."

It is a curious thing that the Army has sometimes suffered from a shortage of cigarettes in Egypt, of all places under the sun. Tommy Atkins appears to have a real dislike for Egyptian tobacco—which always seems plentiful enough in Cairo—and prefers Woodbines to Melachrinos. The military canteens recently rose to the occasion by importing a new Virginian cigarette, but having selected a brand bearing the name of "the Chief Whip," they laid themselves open to the witticisms of soldier-humorists, who saw in the "Cheap Whiff" a novel pseudo-Spoonerism.

* * * * *

Life in the Wadi Ghuzze was not thrilling. Heat, dust, flies, and above all boredom, were its principal characteristics. Letters from home took an unconscionable time on the journey and sometimes went to the bottom of the sea. Cairo newspapers were

difficult to obtain and still more difficult to believe. London weeklies were often stale when they arrived, though they shed more light on current events. And leave to England from the E.E.F. is only available for those who can tell such a tale of business catastrophe or marital infidelity as would wring tears from a block of Assouan granite. "Short leave in Egypt," with its few days of wild gaiety in Cairo, is not to be despised, but on the other hand it is a poor substitute for a glimpse of one's home after a few years of absence. Yet, when all is said and done, we who are serving in Egypt and Palestine know that we are fortunate to have had such a chance of seeing these ancient lands, a chance that would never have come to most of us in the ordinary course of our tranquil lives.

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